

Jobs, Safety and a New Deal



**Executive Council Statement
to the 2021 ADM**



Usdaw
*Union of Shop, Distributive
and Allied Workers*



Foreword by Paddy Lillis, Usdaw General Secretary



Usdaw members and reps have played an essential role in ensuring the UK gets through the Coronavirus crisis. I cannot put into words how immensely proud I am of the Union and what our members have done on the frontline of the crisis.

From the beginning of the crisis, Usdaw members and reps worked extremely hard to ensure that food remained on the shelves and that people were able to shop safely. From dealing with panic-buying to adapting to new ways of working, Usdaw members have been at the forefront of the response.

Despite these incredible contributions, the virus continued to take hold and over 125,000 people have sadly died from Coronavirus. This included Usdaw members and reps who contributed so much to help.

On behalf of Usdaw, I would like to offer my deepest sympathies to all those affected by Coronavirus. This statement pays tribute to their hard work and commitment to their communities.

We are hopefully now looking towards the end days of the crisis. The Government must now take clear action to protect the retail sector and ensure that the incredible contribution of key workers is fully recognised.

Many retail workers and their families have been hurt financially by the crisis. Millions have been furloughed and seen their incomes drop as a result.

The crisis has resulted in nearly 200,000 jobs being lost across the retail sector. This is having a knock-on effect in distribution, food manufacturing and many other sectors. Usdaw is clear that the Government must urgently act to protect the economy and jobs.

Furthermore, we must move on from the situation before the crisis where low paid workers were struggling to put food on the table and heat their houses. As a result of the crisis, jobs that were previously seen as 'unskilled' are now recognised as essential and those who perform these jobs are rightly recognised as key workers.

Usdaw is campaigning to ensure that these workers are treated fairly, paid properly and able to earn enough money to live comfortably.

This Executive Council Statement looks back on what has been an extremely difficult period for our members. At the same time, it sets out the plan for the future. A plan that ensures job security and full recognition of the incredible work Usdaw members undertake.

I urge you to read this statement, reflect on the extreme difficulties caused by the crisis and then get involved in our campaigns for a recovery plan to protect jobs and a New Deal for Workers.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paddy Lillis".

Paddy Lillis
General Secretary



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The Rise of the Virus

The world's first case of Covid-19 is believed to have been identified on 17 November 2019 and from here, the disease quickly spread around the world.

On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a public health emergency of international concern and Governments were urged to prepare for the global spread of the Covid-19 Coronavirus. Around the same time, the first UK case of Covid-19 was recorded.

By 11 March, the outbreak had spread to multiple countries across the globe and was labelled a pandemic by WHO. The WHO Director-General called on Governments to take 'urgent and aggressive action' to control the Covid-19 outbreak.

Following his appeal, several countries announced increasingly stringent measures to try to contain the virus. Italy imposed a strict lockdown with Spain and France following suit shortly after.

The UK Response

In contrast, the UK Government's response to the Coronavirus pandemic was much more low-key. It was not until 12 March 2020, that Prime Minister Boris Johnson held his first major press conference on the subject. Despite warning that "many more families are going to lose loved ones before their time", no clear action was taken at this stage to stop the spread of the virus. People were advised to wash their hands regularly and stay at home for seven days if they displayed symptoms of the virus.

No recommendations were given to ban major public events such as sporting fixtures, with the Prime Minister declaring that the scientific advice suggested it "would have little effect on the spread". Meanwhile, more than 250,000 people gathered in Cheltenham for the annual horse-racing festival.

On Monday, 16 March 2020, the Government was forced to change strategy following scientific modelling which showed that the previous measures would lead to hundreds of thousands of deaths. At a press conference, Boris Johnson encouraged people to adopt social distancing measures and anyone who lived with someone showing Coronavirus symptoms was told to self-isolate for 14 days. Furthermore, people were advised to avoid non-essential travel, as well as pubs and other social venues, but this advice

was not enforced. People were also advised to work from home if possible, but schools, non-food retail and hospitality remained open.

The Government's mixed messaging meant that controlling the spread of the virus was initially left up to personal judgement. On Wednesday, 18 March 2020, it was announced that schools would close, except for vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

Key Worker Status

As part of the school closure announcement, the Government made reference to 'Key Workers'. Due to their importance to the economy, key workers were able to continue sending their children to school or other educational settings during the outbreak. Along with teachers and NHS staff, Usdaw members in food retail, the retail supply chain including food manufacturing, delivery drivers, those in the pharmaceutical industry and funeral workers were classed as key workers. Through being granted key worker status, the essential role of Usdaw members in helping communities to get through the Coronavirus emergency was recognised.

Panic-Buying

As Coronavirus cases continued to increase, panic-buying gripped the nation. Anxious shoppers stripped the supermarket shelves of essential items such as toilet paper, pasta and hand sanitiser. The UK saw nearly 80 million extra grocery shopping trips in March – spending almost £2 billion more on food and drink compared to 2019.

This increase in business caused mayhem for supermarket workers, and those in the supply chain, as shops struggled to keep up with the level of demand caused by stockpiling. Many retailers had to place limits on the number of individual items that could be purchased per customer while staff worked round the clock in difficult circumstances to help customers get the items they needed.

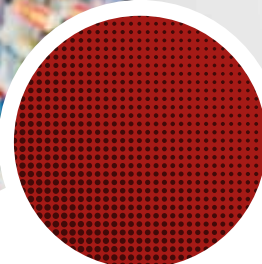
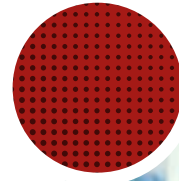
Usdaw's Survey 'The Impact of Coronavirus on the Workforce' revealed that a lack of stock due to panic-buying was one of the key flashpoints for abuse faced by our members at the forefront of providing essential services.

The First Lockdown

On 23 March 2020, the UK Government finally announced a nationwide lockdown. All non-essential shops were forced to close and public gatherings of more than two people were banned. The British public were advised to only leave their homes for one of four reasons:

- Shopping for basic necessities.
- One form of exercise a day – alone or with members of your household.
- Any medical need, or to provide care for a vulnerable person.
- Travelling to and from work, but only where working could not be done from home.

By the time the Government introduced lockdown, community transmission was widespread. This inadequate response to the most serious public health crisis of our time likely contributed to the UK having one of the highest Coronavirus death tolls in the world.



Right from the start of the outbreak, the safety of Usdaw members was a key concern for the Union.

Ushaw Health and Safety Reps highlighted issues in their workplaces and delivered results for the benefit of members. Furthermore, the Union helped to produce workplace risk assessments right across the sectors where we organise, as part of our efforts to keep members safe in thousands of workplaces.

Clinically Extremely Vulnerable and Clinically Vulnerable

As part of plans to control the impact of the virus, the Government published specific guidance for individuals with certain underlying health conditions.

Those at highest risk were classed as Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) and told to 'shield' throughout the first wave of the virus. 'Shielding' involved remaining at home and not meeting anyone from outside your household.

Those whose risk was not as high as those on the CEV list including pregnant women, people over 70 and those with certain underlying health conditions, were classed as Clinically Vulnerable. During the first wave of the pandemic, the Government strongly advised that these people should take particular care to minimise contact with others outside their household.

Ushaw negotiated with a range of employers to provide additional paid leave for Clinically Vulnerable and CEV workers so that they would not have to attend the workplace during the first wave of the pandemic.

As transmission reduced in the second half of 2020, and those on both lists returned to work, the Union ensured measures and risk assessments were in place to protect these workers.

As new and more infectious strains of the virus emerged and transmission rates increased, those on the CEV list were again advised not to attend work. Again, the Union ensured that these workers still received pay while following Government guidance.

Pregnant Workers

In light of pregnant women being deemed to be vulnerable to the disease, specific health and safety protections came into force. As a result, if a pregnant worker cannot be kept safe while in their usual role, there is an opportunity for adjustments to be agreed with their manager. This can include working from home, so long as it is both suitable and appropriate.

If relevant adjustments to create a safe working environment cannot be provided, a pregnant worker has the right to be suspended on full pay until a suitable alternative role is found, or for as long as necessary to avoid the increased risk of infection. This is known as 'maternity suspension'.

Prior to the virus outbreak, there was little understanding of the particular rights protecting pregnant workers. Ushaw promoted the right to maternity suspension with our employers and also raised this with the Government. The Union had to repeatedly push for Government advice to be publicised to make all employers aware of this right. Ushaw's interventions have ensured that maternity suspension is correctly paid to thousands of pregnant workers. Where employers have not provided access to maternity suspension, the Union has been able to provide legal advice and support to members.

Social Distancing

For many Ushaw members, working from home has not been an option. In addition, supermarkets and convenience stores have been one of the few workplaces where members of the public have continually been able to enter and congregate.

The Union had to react quickly to ensure our members were protected from the risks of the virus. Ushaw worked with employers to put adequate social distancing provisions and other health and safety measures in place.

We worked with employers to rearrange workplaces so that staff, customers and visitors could be at least two metres apart. This included introducing signage across stores and placing limits on the number of people that could enter a shop at any one time.

Usdaw also ensured employers adopted a range of other policies to keep our members safe such as, increasing staffing hours for cleaning staff, allowing people additional time away from workstations for hand washing and staggering break times to ensure social distancing in staff rooms and canteens.

Usdaw workplace reps have done a crucial job in their workplaces, making sure that these policies are properly implemented and that issues are raised on behalf of their members. This has been extremely challenging when working in such a pressurised environment.

It has also been important to ensure that customers are aware of the need to adapt their shopping habits. Usdaw's high profile campaign across social media has encouraged shoppers to shop safely.

Online Retail – 'Business as Normal'

Despite non-essential retail being forced to shut, online retail and home delivery services have been encouraged by the Government to remain open.

The nature of these workplaces means that two metre social distancing can be very difficult.

Usdaw worked with many employers to re-organise their operations and ensure that two metre social distancing is maintained.

Other measures have included:

- Additional sinks, provision of hand sanitiser for individuals and provision of cleaning equipment for all work stations.
- Identifying and regularly cleaning key touch points, eg door handles and keypads.
- Taking extra care wiping down vehicles and workstations before and after each use.

Outside of unionised workplaces, we have seen many employers understate the need for appropriate measures, resulting in continued Coronavirus issues. Again, the benefits of strong union organisation have been clearly demonstrated when protecting working people against the threats of the virus.



During the crisis, a number of measures have been introduced to support individuals who have been adversely affected. The Trade Union Movement has played a key role in ensuring the Government prioritises the right measures to protect the most vulnerable people in our society.

Job Retention Scheme

The Government introduced the Job Retention Scheme to provide financial support to employees who were unable to work normally as a result of the virus. The scheme was developed in a matter of weeks following detailed negotiations between Government, employers and unions.

Under the scheme, employers are able to furlough workers who are not able to work normally (ie workers are paid even though they were not working).

The scheme initially covered 80% of the wage costs of workers, up to £2,500 per month.

The scheme covers all workers on PAYE payroll including:

- Full-time employees.
- Part-time employees.
- Employees on agency contracts.
- Employees on flexible or zero-hour contracts.

The scheme has made sure individuals who could not attend work normally were able to stay safe at home. This has not just been financial protection for those workers, but also a crucial part of keeping people safe from the virus, particularly for many who are deemed to be vulnerable or extremely vulnerable.

The Changing Scheme

A number of significant changes were made to the scheme during the crisis:

● Flexible Furlough

Usdaw, alongside the TUC, lobbied for the scheme to allow employers to furlough workers on a part-time basis so that they could complete some of their hours and remain furloughed for any hours unworked. The Government agreed to this amendment from 1 July 2020.

● Employer Contributions

There were several changes to the employer contributions in the Job Retention Scheme. From August 2020, employers were required to make some contribution to the scheme; this was gradually increased to include 20% of wage costs by October. The Government had announced that the scheme would close at the end of October. Usdaw and other unions highlighted that closing the scheme at this point would cost hundreds of thousands of jobs.

On 31 October 2020, the Government announced that the scheme would be extended to the end of March 2021, with the Government guaranteeing to cover the entire 80% minimum wage costs. Subsequently, the scheme was extended until the end of September 2021, however employers will be expected to contribute 10% of wage costs in July and 20% in August and September. Usdaw is concerned that these costs will be implemented before employers have a chance to recover from the impact of the virus. As such, these costs are likely to result in businesses laying off staff or reducing terms and conditions.

Universal Credit

At the height of the crisis new claims for Universal Credit rocketed. By the end of 2020, 3.6 million people had made new claims for Universal Credit since the start of the crisis. This was over double the number of people making claims before the crisis started.

Claimants have had a wide variety of needs – some were designated as self-employed people and not eligible for payment from the Job Retention Scheme, many have been furloughed workers unable to make ends meet due to a 20% drop in pay and others have seen their family/household income fall due to hours being cut. Many people have also lost their jobs as a result of the crisis.

The huge numbers of people claiming Universal Credit brought attention to the fact that the payment is not enough to live on. Following significant pressure, the Government agreed to uplift the standard rate of Universal Credit by £20 per week until the end of September 2021. Whilst this has been a welcome acknowledgement that Universal Credit is leaving people in poverty, Usdaw and the

TUC have both highlighted that the new rate is still not enough for families to live on. Other elements of Universal Credit, such as the five-week wait and the two-child limit, are also still resulting in unfair financial hardship.

Usdaw, the TUC and welfare organisations are campaigning for Universal Credit to be replaced with a fair system that protects families and treats people with dignity. Ensuring a proper social security system, that can protect individuals in times of need, remains a key priority for the Union.

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)

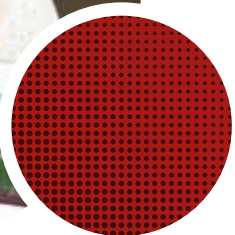
From the beginning of the crisis, trade unions have also highlighted that SSP provisions are incompatible with tackling the virus. The criteria for SSP was quickly changed. As from March 2020, anyone needing to self-isolate has been entitled to SSP, rather than just those who are classed as 'sick'.

Following the changes, subject to the lower earnings limit, SSP can be claimed by anyone who has:

- Coronavirus symptoms or has tested positive for Coronavirus.
- Been asked to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace.
- Someone in their household or 'support bubble' who has tested positive for Coronavirus.
- Been advised to shield because they are at very high risk of severe illness from Coronavirus (in areas where shielding is live).

People claiming SSP for Coronavirus related absence received payment from day one of their absence, the usual three waiting days still apply to non-Coronavirus-related absence.

Throughout the crisis, it has remained clear that, despite experiencing Coronavirus symptoms, people have been forced to attend work as a result of financial worries. Losing out financially to follow public health advice does not make sense from a public health point of view. Usdaw has made the case for all workers to have access to SSP based on their normal earnings.



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The Incredible Contributions of Usdaw's Key Workers

Throughout the crisis, the contribution of key workers, many of whom were Usdaw members, cannot be underestimated.

The Union has always known that Usdaw members and reps carry out vital work that is essential to the economy and our communities. Unfortunately, this has not always been understood by the public or reflected in the media.

As the crisis developed, the availability of food and essential goods, and the measures put in place to keep shoppers and staff safe became a big news story – and of great interest to concerned members of the public.

Shoppers finally developed an understanding of the essential work undertaken by workers right across the food supply chain, and a new found admiration for the roles they carry out.

People quickly realised that the work being carried out by those across the food supply chain was critical to keeping everyone fed and keeping the country functioning throughout the crisis.

People's Appreciation: Clapping for Key Workers

People felt moved to come together and show appreciation for key workers. Many tributes were paid to those who continued working despite the risks to their own health of contracting the virus and becoming ill.

Clapping for key workers became a regular event every Thursday evening at 8 pm. Each week, streets were filled with neighbours clapping and banging pots and pans to show their gratitude for all key workers keeping the country going during the crisis. Millions of people took part, bringing a sense of community and rightful recognition of the incredible work being undertaken by key workers.

The courageous contributions of key workers were further recognised when frontline workers from all major supermarket chains were recognised in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

It is clear that the country could not have got through the crisis without the incredible contributions of our members. The Union will continue to campaign to ensure these contributions are fully recognised by Government and employers.

Bonus Payments

Following negotiations with Usdaw, many employers recognised the contributions of our members through additional bonus payments. The details of bonus payments varied across different employers, with many companies offering a 10% bonus while others provided additional holiday entitlement or improvements to existing bonus payments.



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Usdaw – Winning for Members

Throughout the crisis, Usdaw and the TUC has lobbied and campaigned to make sure the concerns of ordinary working people were listened to by Government.

Some examples include:

● Job Retention Scheme

Usdaw, alongside the TUC, were heavily involved in lobbying to ensure the Job Retention Scheme protected our members. Usdaw's lobbying helped to ensure that:

- Furlough pay was based on actual hours worked not just contractual pay, meaning those on short-hours contracts received adequate protection.
- Entitlement to Universal Credit and other benefit payments were not negatively affected as a result of being placed on furlough.
- 'Piece rate' bonus payments, commonly paid in food manufacturing and distribution sites, were included in furlough calculations.

● Key Worker Status

Usdaw was also instrumental in ensuring our members were given key worker status during the crisis.

In March 2020, following the announcement of school closures, the Union wrote to Gavin Williamson, Education Secretary, calling for key worker status to be given to food retail workers, those across the food supply chain, pharmaceutical distribution workers and those in the funeral industry.

The Government listened and members were rightly identified as key workers.

● Sunday Trading

During the pandemic, media reports suggested that the Government was considering extending Sunday trading hours in retail.

Usdaw has always been clear that the Sunday trading arrangements in England and Wales are a compromise that works. Shops get time to trade and workers also have time for a well-earned break.

We carried out a snap survey of members which gathered over 12,000 responses – 92% were opposed to extending Sunday trading. We took this evidence to the Government, and also contacted MPs to make sure they were aware of this strong feeling from retail workers. Our campaign was successful, and the Government scrapped their plans to extend Sunday trading hours.

● Retail Guidance on Safe Opening

As the first lockdown was coming to an end and non-essential retail shops were looking to reopen, there were significant concerns over health and safety measures. Usdaw had detailed discussions with the British Retail Consortium to provide industry leading guidance for how the sector could operate safely. This guidance was widely used and became a blueprint for other sectors.

● National Minimum Wage

Media reports suggested the Government were looking to freeze National Minimum Wage (NMW) rates in 2021. This would have been a devastating blow to millions of low paid workers.

Usdaw quickly contacted the Low Pay Commission to express our concern at these reports, and put across the case that low paid workers – many of them key workers throughout the crisis – deserved a pay rise.

It was announced in November 2020 that there would be an increase to the NMW with the top rate (the National Living Wage) increasing by 2.2%. Usdaw continues to push for a further, immediate increase in all NMW rates to at least £10 per hour.



The virus has impacted all areas of society. However, some groups of workers, many already facing challenges before the crisis, have faced a disproportionate impact on their jobs, pay and health.

Low Paid Workers and Mental Health

The majority of Usdaw members have been unable to work from home. Every day, low paid workers in frontline and public-facing roles are facing increased risk of exposure and worry for themselves and their families. Sick pay for self-isolation is not always enough to make ends meet, leading to financial stress.

Low paid workers in the hardest hit sectors, like non-food retail, have faced the constant uncertainty of temporary closures, furlough on reduced pay, and losing their job as businesses struggle to stay open.

Low pay and insecure work were already factors contributing to a growing mental health crisis in the UK.

The combination of these factors has meant that it is the lowest paid workers who have borne the brunt of the impact of Coronavirus on their mental health.

Disproportionate Impact on Black Workers

Black people are disproportionately more at risk of severe illness and dying from Coronavirus. Long standing inequality has put Black workers at higher risk because of the jobs they do, the barriers to protecting themselves at work, and their experience of racism.

According to Usdaw's own evidence, Black workers are overrepresented in low paid, high risk work, often in sectors that are less well organised, with less access to sick pay and other employment rights.

Social distancing is much harder in frontline roles increasing the risk of exposure. TUC evidence shows that Black workers are less likely to receive adequate levels of sick pay to support them to self-isolate, and less likely to raise issues at work because of the risk of being penalised by loss of hours, increased workload, or losing their job.

When health and safety concerns are raised about social distancing and a lack of proper personal protective equipment (PPE) the evidence is that Black workers are more likely to have their concerns ignored or dismissed by employers, and their requests for risk assessments refused.

These experiences have left Black workers overexposed and under-protected during the pandemic.

Redundancies Amongst Young Workers

Some of the industries most affected by the crisis have been those which employ large numbers of young workers. As a result of significant job losses across industries such as leisure, hospitality and retail, young people have been disproportionately disadvantaged by the virus.

The number of 16-24 year olds in work is now lower than during the 2008 financial crisis and at the end of 2020 more than 750,000 young workers were facing unemployment.

Young workers are also more likely to have had hours cut or be placed on furlough and less likely to have had their pay topped up by their employer. Millions of young people have received less than the minimum wage because of the lack in protection to prevent people being paid below minimum wage in the Job Retention Scheme.

Women and Childcare

The pandemic has intensified the problems facing parents juggling work and care. Even in 'normal' times balancing work and family is not easy.

Formal and informal networks of childcare disappeared overnight when schools and childcare closed in March and restrictions were placed on friends and family. Even for those classed as key workers, childcare places were limited.

As school closures and local restrictions continued, women have been more likely to shoulder the majority of responsibility for additional childcare – arranging their work around repeated school closures, taking children for testing and looking after them during multiple periods of self-isolation.

Usdaw members unable to work from home have faced a gap in paid support and a lack of flexibility from employers. With limited options, many women have had to reduce their hours or take unpaid leave, and some have been squeezed out of paid work altogether. A survey by Usdaw at the height of the first wave of the pandemic found that one in ten key worker parents had to take unpaid leave to deal with childcare. This compares to 1% who were able to take additional paid leave. All too often, the costs of school closures unfairly fell on the lowest paid.

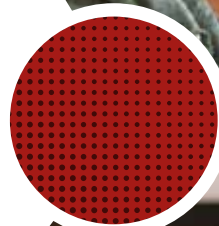
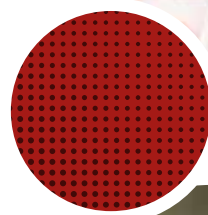
Disabled Workers

The shielding measures introduced during the crisis impacted disproportionately on disabled workers. Disabled workers are more likely to be identified in Clinically Vulnerable and Clinically Extremely Vulnerable groups and those unable to work from home rely on support from their employer.

While the overwhelming majority of Usdaw members affected have been supported by their employer, the TUC estimates that one in five disabled workers have missed out on support entirely. Requests to work from home, be furloughed or temporarily change work location have been rejected by employers. This has left disabled workers in many non-unionised workplaces in the impossible position of choosing between their health and their job.

LGBT

Social distancing and lockdown has resulted in social isolation for many people and this is particularly the case for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender people. The Government designed the lockdown rules based on a concept of what an average family or household looked like. This caused particular problems of social isolation for all people living in households that do not fit into this conservative 'norm'. Also LGBT workers who rely on solidarity from networks both inside and outside of work have found that the social distancing measures made it more difficult to access these support networks.



Doubling of Abuse

Nobody should go to work in fear of threats, abuse and violence, however, all too often, this is the reality for retail workers.

From the beginning of the crisis the traditional flashpoints, like shop theft, age-restricted sales and serving alcohol, were overtaken by customer abuse as a result of long queueing times, social distancing measures and the requirement to wear face coverings.

In the first months of the Covid-19 crisis, Usdaw carried out a survey of members on their experiences. The Union found that incidents against retail staff had doubled. It became clear that the retail workers were being abused as a result of the very measures being put in place to keep the public safe.

In September, early curfews were introduced in pubs across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Usdaw surveyed over 1,000 shop workers about the impact of these curfews across hospitality to understand its effect on our members. Nearly half of those surveyed said they had been impacted by the 10 pm curfew with increased instances of the following:

- **27%** – Overcrowding in shops that makes social distancing difficult.
- **28%** – Anti-social behaviour.
- **28%** – Abuse of store staff.
- **24%** – Refusing drunk customers (as the law requires).
- **15%** – Problems with verifying age.

Petition – ‘Protect Retail Workers from Abuse, Threats and Violence’

Despite growing evidence of increased abuse against retail workers, the Government has continued to block legislation to protect retail staff. Violence and abuse against someone doing their job is never acceptable, so in July, Usdaw launched a Parliamentary petition calling for legislation to protect retail workers from abuse, threats and violence.

The petition was backed by major retailers, including the likes of Tesco, Morrisons, Sainsbury’s and Co-op, along with support from the industry’s leading trade bodies such as the British Retail Consortium and Association of Convenience Stores. The petition reached 10,000 signatures within the first day thereby triggering a Government response, which offered little in the way of action to help curb the rise in abuse against shopworkers. In total, the petition received over 104,000 signatures, meaning that it would be considered for debate in Parliament.

Respect Week

During the 2020 Respect for Shopworkers week, from 16 to 22 November 2020, Usdaw continued to promote the message that abuse is not part of the job. Due to the ongoing public health crisis the Union did not ask reps to run stalls in their workplace.

The campaign was run across TV, radio, newspapers, social media and by displaying stickers on protective screens in shops throughout the UK. The campaign ensured that the shopping public were aware of the issues Usdaw members face on a daily basis and the need to respect key workers.

During the week, Usdaw, along with the Co-op Group, organised a number of listening events where our reps had the opportunity to explain to police forces the true extent of issues faced by retail workers. These meetings provided an excellent opportunity to engage with the police and ensure that they take violence and abuse against shop staff seriously.



Organising the Workplace

The increase in abuse, threats and violence throughout the crisis, clearly showed the need for effective trade union organising. As we spoke with police force representatives throughout Respect Week, it became clear that most incidents were never properly reported and therefore the issue was all too frequently overlooked. Usdaw's 'Freedom From Fear' Campaign calls on all employers to ensure that adequate time should be allowed for individuals to report incidents.

Having high membership levels in store, supported by an effective team of reps, can help to ensure that incidents are routinely reported. Ensuring that incidents are reported will help to ensure that the issue is taken seriously by employers and police forces. As such, strong organisation across workplaces remains a key method of tackling the issues behind the 'Freedom From Fear' Campaign.

Daniel Johnson's Bill

Usdaw continued its work with Daniel Johnson MSP, on the introduction of a new law in Scotland to protect retail workers from abuse, threats and violence. Despite a disappointing response from the Conservative Government at Westminster, thanks to Scottish Labour's campaign, Scotland has become the first part of the UK to give frontline retail workers the additional legal protection they need from the ever increasing problem of violence and abuse.

Having been passed unanimously by the Scottish Parliament, the Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act is expected to come into force by August 2021.



Impact of the Pandemic

The Coronavirus pandemic has impacted the UK retail sector on an unprecedented scale. As the pandemic unfolded, online-only retailers were able to utilise their already existing advantage to increase sales and grow profits. At the same time, many traditional high street retailers did not have the cash reserves to withstand periods of closure and reduced shopper numbers, and as a result a number of well-known retailers collapsed.

Even prior to the pandemic, high streets were already in a state of decline with vacant properties and job losses seen all too often. The Coronavirus crisis accelerated the decline of the high street in a way none of us could have foreseen; with a significant number of retailers falling into administration, closing stores and cutting jobs. This included popular high street fashion names like New Look, Aldo, Warehouse, Oasis and Cath Kidston and more traditional retailers like Debenhams and Clarks.

The Government's response to mitigate the impact of the Coronavirus on the retail sector took the form of short-term measures – business rates relief, VAT deferral and the suspension of business evictions (rent moratorium) – but these interim measures did not sustain the sector for long as liabilities continued to build up.

The easing of restrictions in June 2020 offered some reprieve but this was short lived. At the start of July, UK firms slashed more than 12,000 jobs over just two days – a large number of these jobs were concentrated in high street retail. A week later, two of the UK's biggest high street retailers, John Lewis and Boots, announced a staggering 5,300 job cuts between them.

Figures from the Centre for Retail Research (CRR), estimated nearly 125,000 retail jobs had already been lost in the UK in the first eight months of 2020.

The Second Wave

The delay from Government in announcing an extension to the Job Retention Scheme (JRS) resulted in further unnecessary job losses across the sector. Many retailers, who could not afford to cope with the furlough scheme closing as planned on 31 October, announced redundancies before the middle of September to comply with 30 to 45 day statutory redundancy consultation periods. The news

of the continuation of 80% support from an extended JRS, which came on the very day it was meant to end, came too late for many jobs and workers.

The second lockdown saw many more employers paying the minimum 80% of wages to furloughed workers. More than half of employees earning less than £9 per hour who were furloughed received reduced pay of 80%. People employed in higher paid roles were more likely to get full pay. From the start of the crisis, Usdaw called on employers to top up the pay of any furloughed workers to their normal average earnings. The further necessary closure of non-essential stores in response to rising infection rates ahead of the crucial Christmas trading period had a big impact on the retail high street with the British Retail Consortium (BRC) estimating that the closure of non-essential retail shops across England in November cost around £8 billion in lost sales. The closure of non-essential retail continued in the New Year.

During this time, the Arcadia Group and Bonmarché went into administration putting 14,500 jobs at risk and Debenhams confirmed it was closing all stores, resulting in around 12,000 job losses.

Despite the various challenges facing the industry, retail remains a fundamental part of the UK economy, labour market and local communities. Throughout the pandemic UK retailers in all parts of the sector have played a crucial role in helping to ensure the British public could remain safe and had access to the goods they needed.

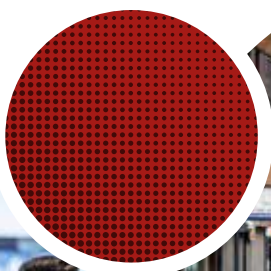
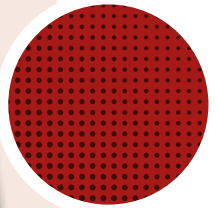
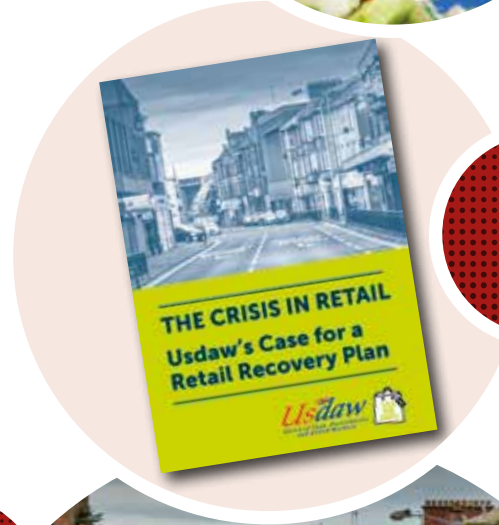
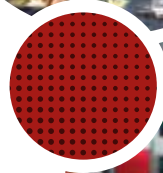
Retail Recovery Plan

The Government must play its part, by providing support to businesses that were forced to close and are struggling as a direct result of the pandemic and subsequent restrictions.

The high street can survive but it needs help and targeted Government support. Usdaw is urging the Government to work with all key stakeholders to develop an urgent recovery plan for the sector built on the following measures:

- Fundamental reform of business rates; retailers need clear and decisive action from Government to reform/reduce this outdated and imbalanced commercial property tax. The temporary relief announced so far by Government will not address the underlying issues facing the high street.

- An immediate and comprehensive review of rental values and lease arrangements. Interim support should include Government assistance to help pay shop rents for any period where retailers have been required to close. While the moratorium on evictions was welcome, unpaid rents continue to accrue and will become liable at some point. In the long-term we need a re-balancing of power between landlords and tenants and a wider debate on how rents and leases are set and negotiated. Local authorities should have more powers to influence and control retail shop rents.
- Reform of UK tax law to ensure that companies pay their fair share of tax through tackling tax avoidance and the use of offshore havens, with the aim of creating a level playing field between online and bricks and mortar retailers.
- Funding for local authorities so they can invest in their local economy, transport networks and high streets. We cannot revive our high streets if core services continue to be undermined.
- Investment in skills for retail workers, including through Union Learning and high-quality apprenticeships. This should include an in-depth assessment of emerging trends and potential skills shortages/gaps within the sector.
- A new deal for retail, distribution and home delivery workers based around a real living wage and guaranteed hours.



Eradicating Low Pay

The pandemic has brought about widespread recognition and appreciation of the crucial role of key workers to the economy and our communities. Usdaw members have been relied upon throughout the pandemic to keep society going, delivering supplies and stocking food shelves.

In a moment of crisis, the true value of the essential work that Usdaw members carry out has been revealed to the general public. It is no exaggeration to say that the country could not function without them. However, the pay and conditions of these workers does not adequately reflect their essential contribution to society and the economy's wellbeing. They have been underpaid and undervalued for too long.

The huge sacrifices that our members have made should not be forgotten once the crisis is over. Despite the risks to them and their families, Usdaw members have stepped up when called upon, continuing to work hard in frontline customer-facing roles where potential exposure to the virus has been a very real threat. Whilst putting themselves in harm's way, they have had to adapt to the challenging situation, often undertaking new responsibilities, such as implementing social distancing and new health and safety regulations.

Left unchecked, the economic consequences of the pandemic will push many workers over the edge, following on from a decade where in-work poverty became all too common. The Coronavirus economic recovery must deliver for the workers that got us through the crisis.

The Union is clear that we must move on from the situation where key workers on low pay are struggling to make ends meet. Exploitative employment practices such as zero-hours contracts and one-sided flexibility should now come to an end. There must be lasting and fundamental changes to the labour market so that workers are properly rewarded for their efforts and inequalities are fixed in our economy. We need a new deal for workers.

In the post-crisis period, the Government must prioritise delivering genuine improvements to the standard of living for key workers. Anything less would be historically unjust and unfair.

A New Deal for Workers

Udaw is calling for:

A Real Living Wage for all Workers: All workers deserve a genuine real living wage. Usdaw is campaigning for the National Minimum Wage to be immediately increased to at least £10 per hour for workers of all ages.

Minimum Contract of 16 Hours per Week for Everyone who wants it: Many workers are on short-hours contracts that do not ensure enough hours to get by. This leaves them unable to earn a decent living.

A 'Normal Hours' Contract: One-sided flexibility must end. Too many workers are having to rely on non-contractual non-guaranteed additional hours to make ends meet. Workers' contracts should reflect the hours that they normally work, providing guarantees that hours will not be drastically cut from one week to the next.

A Ban on Zero-Hours Contracts: Despite their hugely damaging effect on workers' mental health, the use of zero-hours contracts has reached a record high. These exploitative contracts should be banned.

Improved Sick Pay: Statutory Sick Pay is not enough to live on, meaning many workers cannot afford to miss work when ill. Forcing ill workers into work is dangerous and benefits no-one. All workers should be eligible for sick pay from day one, at their normal pay rate.

Protection at Work: It is a disgrace that whilst delivering vital services to the public during this crisis, workers have lived in fear of abuse. The Government must enact legislation to protect public-facing workers, making it a specific offence to assault them.

A Proper Social Security System: With unemployment rising, we need a proper social security system that provides us all with a real safety net, not the unfit for purpose Universal Credit system. Universal Credit needs to be fundamentally overhauled, with the disastrous five-week wait abolished. As an immediate measure, the £20 temporary uplift should be extended indefinitely.

Job Security: Many key workers find themselves under a never-ending cloud of uncertainty, facing wave after wave of job cuts. To combat this, we need day one employment rights for unfair dismissal and redundancy, as well as proper consultation about new technology, and investment in skills. It is too easy and too cheap for business to make workers redundant.

Fair Treatment and Equality for all Workers: The majority of workers on the frontline are women, who deserve equal pay and decent pay. We need new family-friendly rights to help parents and carers juggling work and family life.

A Voice at Work: Throughout this pandemic, unions have shown why they are so important for workers, promoting their interests with the Government and employers. Trade union rights should be strengthened, with hurdles around statutory recognition removed and union membership encouraged.



Conclusion

As this Executive Council statement has clearly outlined, the UK's response to the Coronavirus crisis has been dependent on the courageous efforts of Usdaw members. Right across food retail and the food supply chain, as well as in sectors such as pharmaceutical distribution and funeral services, Usdaw members have responded brilliantly to the unfolding crisis, whilst putting their own health at risk.

To ensure our members are protected, reps and officials negotiated with and lobbied employers to ensure that adequate health and safety provisions are in place. Where employers failed to adopt the correct safety measures, the Union ensured that members were organised, represented and their issues were dealt with.

This crisis showed us many things about society and the world of work including the importance of all workers joining a trade union.

Unfortunately, the crisis is going to impact society for many years to come. The Government spent record sums of money during 2020 and the economy shrunk by levels which were previously unimaginable. Key workers and those on low pay must not be expected to pay the economic costs of the crisis.

It was the Conservative Government's failures which caused the crisis to have such a devastating impact upon the economy. The Conservatives cannot expect workers to bail them out of their failures. We need to organise to ensure that workers do not pay the economic price of this crisis.

The contributions of key workers must be remembered and recognised. The best way to ensure that the contributions of key workers are fully acknowledged and rewarded is through a new deal for workers that delivers a real living wage, job security and guarantees over hours.

Thanks to trade union membership and representation, many workplaces were made safer during the crisis and those people who were defined as Clinically Vulnerable and Clinically Extremely Vulnerable were paid while they were unable to attend work. Trade unions ensured that the Government addressed the needs of the workforce when designing the furlough scheme and Usdaw delivered key worker status for our members.

The Union's Retail Recovery Plan and 'New Deal for Workers' Campaign can clearly make a real difference. However, these campaigns will only be successful if we all make sure that the trade union voice is as strong as possible, speaking on behalf of the whole workforce.

Let us learn and remember the lessons of this crisis. Usdaw will step up the campaign for a new deal for workers, we want Government intervention to protect jobs and we must organise the workplace to achieve our goals.





Improving workers' lives – Winning for members

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