

**CONNECTED
BY DATA**

**Wales
TUC
Cymru**



**A snapshot of
workers in Wales'
understanding of AI**

January 2024

Foreword

In this report, we give a snapshot insight into workers in Wales' current experience of AI. This is intended to inform the union response to AI, and future actions by the Welsh Government and wider partners.

Trade unionists in Wales are quickly adapting and learning in response to the increased use of AI. However, we need to do more together. Workers, unions, employers, technologists, and the Welsh Government must work hand in hand to realise the opportunities and manage the risks of AI together.

With a social partnership approach, we can ensure that everyone thrives in this new environment with no worker being left behind.



Shavanah Taj,
Wales TUC General Secretary

Contents:

Foreword	2
Contents	3
Glossary	4
Executive summary	5
Getting to grips with AI at work	6
AI is not one technology, and doesn't impact workers in the same way	8
Worker voice in shaping workplace technologies	14
Worker-led uses and getting on the front foot	18
Next steps and recommendations	20
Appendix	22
Notes	23
Acknowledgements	24

Glossary

Algorithm

An algorithm is a mathematical rule. Algorithms are used in many different contexts, not just in technology. However, algorithms used in technology are usually a set of rules applied by a computer to come to a decision.¹

Artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) is when computers carry out tasks that you would usually expect to be completed by a human. For example, making decisions or recognising objects, speech and sounds.²

Automation

The use or introduction of automatic equipment in a manufacturing or other process or facility.³

Automated decision-making

Automated decision-making (ADM) involves the use of data, machines and algorithms to make decisions in a range of contexts, including public administration, business, health, education, law, employment, transport, media and entertainment, with varying degrees of human oversight or intervention.⁴

Digitalisation

Digitalisation or digital transformation is the process of adoption and implementation of digital technology by an organisation in order to create new or modify existing products, services and operations by the means of translating business processes into a digital format.⁵

Generative AI

Generative artificial intelligence (also generative AI or GenAI) is artificial intelligence capable of generating text, images, or other media, using generative models. Generative AI models learn the patterns and structure of their input training data and then generate new data that has similar characteristics.⁶ ChatGPT is an example of a generative AI service.

GPS

GPS is a satellite navigation (or satnav) system which can be used for providing position, navigation or for tracking the position of something fitted with a receiver. GPS stands for 'global positioning system.'⁷

Workforce Partnership Council (WPC)

The Workforce Partnership Council (WPC) is a partnership of the trade unions, employers, and Welsh Government. It covers the devolved public services in Wales and is a forum for cross-public services workforce matters.⁸ At its meeting in November 2023 it agreed to establish a working group on AI.

Executive summary

This report summarises key themes from research conducted by Wales TUC on how trade unionists in Wales understand and are engaging with Artificial Intelligence (AI) in their workplaces.

The research found that there is a high degree of general awareness by workers that AI is already impacting or will impact their working lives. However, the level of engagement with AI is specific to context, technology and sector. There are cross-cutting concerns spanning this varied experience, including implications for equalities.

While efforts are underway, trade unionists reported that they are generally not yet sufficiently empowered with accessible, contextualised, and detailed information to understand these specific forms and effects of AI they encounter. This is a barrier to an effective response by trade unionists.

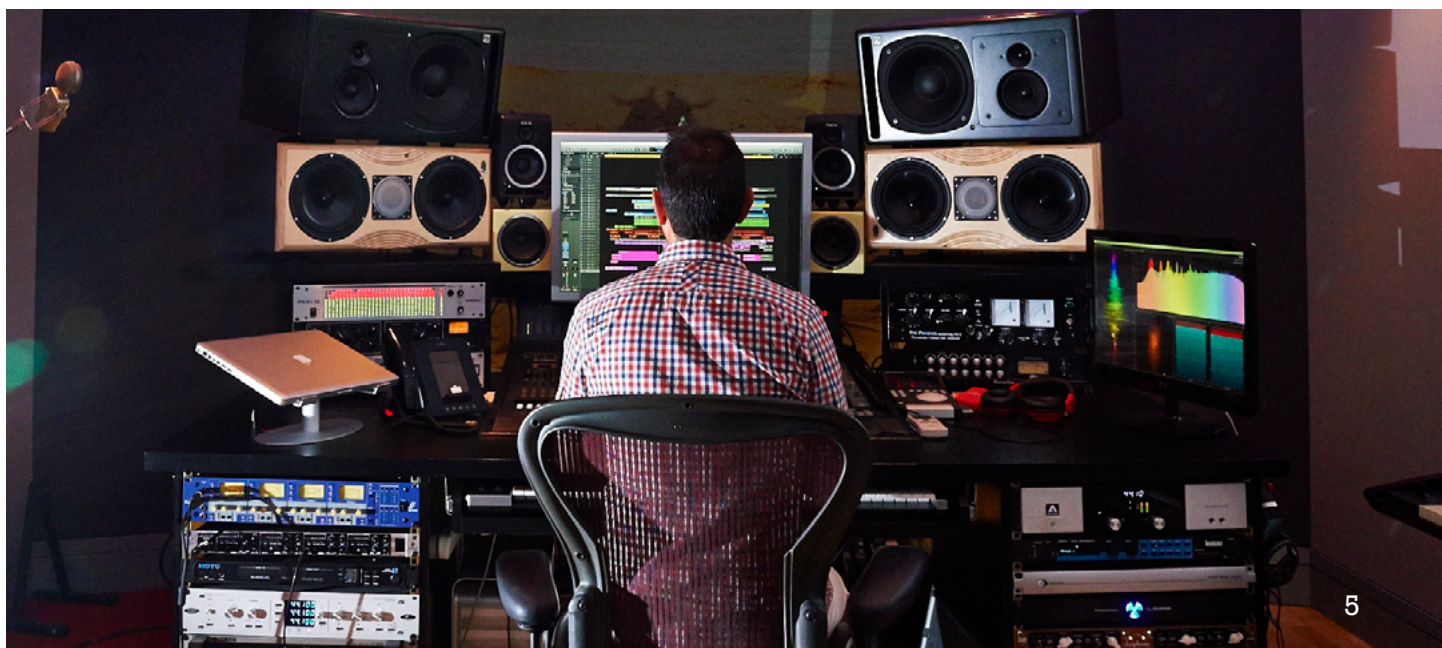
This is compounded by widespread frustration with the limited means and tools workers have at their disposal to ensure that the AI and digitalisation transition is fair and worker-centric.

AI presents novel technical, legal, and operational challenges that threaten to deepen power asymmetries in the workplace and wider economy.

However, this dynamic should be seen in a general context of some of the harshest laws governing industrial relations in western Europe, and employment rights that are not designed to empower workers to be active stakeholders in their workplaces, regarding AI or any other issue.

AI then requires specific responses from the trade union movement within a wider project to elevate the power of workers to shape technology in their workplaces and the economy at large.

This report illustrates these themes with selected excerpts from focus groups conducted with trade unionists. A series of next steps and recommendations are suggested for consideration by the union movement in Wales and the Welsh Government.



Getting to grips with AI at work

From the mechanised loom to the IBM punch card machines, various forms of automation and new technologies have driven change in the workplace, employment relations and industrial structures.

Artificial intelligence, while present since the 1960s, exploded into popular discourse with the launch of ChatGPT late in 2022. The political high profile and technological development presents many threats, both evident and speculated. However, the disruption has also presented an opportunity; to assert the needs of workers in a social and technological shift, and to contest the current domination - of narratives, practices, and policies - by a narrow sliver of perspectives and tech companies.

Despite the intense attention and interest on AI, the conversation has not brought widespread clarity to a complex technological issue. AI encapsulates everything from the most advanced machine learning models to spreadsheet formulae and common algorithms in everyday use.

It has generated furious debate over its specific and general impact on different sectors and society at large. Gaining a clearer picture is an essential precursor to taking action.

Prompted by this, a Resolution on Data and AI was passed at the 2022 Wales TUC Congress to build on the social partnership approach underway in Wales. The resolution called on the Welsh Government to develop a framework for approaching AI that respects the need for worker voice, 'data justice', and managing adverse effects on jobs, among other aspects (see annex below).

To support this resolution, Wales TUC undertook to investigate the current experiences of trade unionists in Wales. Connected by Data and Dr Juan Grigera of King's College London supported this initiative.

Polling commissioned by the Prospect union and published in June 2023 found that a majority of workers would like to see government regulation of generative AI at work and would be uncomfortable being subject to surveillance technologies currently active in many workplaces.⁹

Our research sought to gain qualitative and contextualised insight to complement the substantial evidence of a general concern from workers about the impact of AI on jobs and working lives.

Fifty-six union officials, reps, and unionised workers were interviewed in seven focus groups and one briefing that spanned 19 trade unions and seven broadly defined economic sectors (public sector, education, manufacturing, creative industries, retail, telecommunications, and logistics).

The research programme sought to:

- Understand how union officials and lay workplace reps are experiencing and being impacted by AI in their workplaces.
- Understand the extent to which trade unions are supporting the effective negotiation of technologies in the workplace, and the means workers have to ensure AI is worker-centric. This included asking about training and educational materials produced by the TUC's AI Project and Wales TUC's work on AI and digitalisation with the Workforce Partnership Council.



The project published blog posts of the focus groups as the research was underway. This sought to enable the greater sharing of sector specific detail and contributions by trade unionists.

Published blogs

- [Investigating how AI is understood and impacting Welsh workers and trade unionists](#), August 2023
- [Artificial intelligence is cleverer than you, workers told](#), August 2023
- [How workers at a further education college are taking the initiative on AI deployment](#), September 2023
- [Poor workplace democracy can hinder innovation and health and safety, union reps say](#), November 2023
- [How AI is using creatives' work, voice and images](#), November 2023
- [Fear, optimism and determination: trade unionists respond to artificial intelligence in myriad of ways](#), January 2024

The scope of this report

This report concentrates on the views and experiences of the unionised workers, reps and union officers who participated in the research between July and November 2023.

Trade unionists, reps and officers from the following unions participated: BDA, Bectu, Community, CWU, Equity, FDA, GMB, the Musicians' Union, NASUWT, NEU, NUJ, PCS, the Royal College of Podiatry, the Society of Radiographers, UCAC, UCU, UNISON, Unite and the Writers' Guild of Great Britain.

By engaging active lay trade unionists and union officials, this research has qualitative contributions from this cohort.

Conversely therefore this research has limited insight on the experience of non-unionised workers or workplaces with low rates of unionisation. These sectors include those within which AI is expected to have a significant impact but historically have low union density. These sectors include accountancy, legal professions and the services sector such as marketing.

This report does not specifically engage with the experience of platform or gig workers, as the impact of AI in this sector has substantial research to date.

Finally, this research did not investigate particular incidents, as the focus groups sought to gather the reported experiences and perspectives of workers.

AI is not one technology, and doesn't impact workers in the same way

Public conversation often uses the catch-all term 'AI' to describe a wide range of tools and applications. This both reflects the imagery of popular culture and how applications are marketed, developed and deployed. For example, Digitalisation is a process of building a set of interacting digital tools into a 'stack'. This includes augmenting familiar non-AI digital technologies, such as email or GPS.

While there was a range of understanding, it was observed in the focus groups that different types of technologies and concepts were often conflated and used interchangeably: digitalisation, roboticisation, automation, and artificial intelligence. This indicated a lack of clarity over whether AI was being deployed.

As one rep from the public sector pointed out:

"It is sometimes difficult to tell whether AI is being used or not, as this is software that runs on software we already use."

While tools will share functionality, each AI application or process will have a specific impact on the worker experience. It will be necessary for trade unionists to be able to identify the particular forms and impacts of digitalisation, and develop a more nuanced understanding of the technologies and its effects. As one participant said:

"it's important that people understand that AI isn't just robots, it's software."

Developing a more discrete and targeted understanding can empower workers to navigate a complex and multifaceted issue. It will enable them to focus on the key forms of digitalisation and AI they encounter.

Drawing on the focus groups these are outlined below.

Generative AI: A new dimension

Generative AI, popularised by ChatGPT and text-to-image models such as DALL-E, has been the form of AI to capture public and political attention.

The research observed that the high profile of generative AI, and its significance for particular sectors, has meant that members are expressing alarm at the changes to their working lives.

An official for Equity, the performing arts and entertainment union, explained a case where a member:

"was approached by a fan to say, 'we loved you reading this particular novel'. But the member had never done the audio book. The fan had just gone to a website where they'd asked for 'this book, by this actor' and it provided them with a full transcription, because they had the voice of the actor present. The actor knew nothing about the book. It had been generated using AI after fingerprinting their voice".

An NUJ officer raised concerns with workload and professional skills, citing a job advert requiring a journalist to produce 50 articles a day by augmenting copy produced by generative AI tools.

A photographer pointed to the ability of AI to create photographic images using variations or syntheses of a human work, stating that "scraping content from the web is in many ways just a form of stealing."

Educators were concerned about the challenges generative AI is causing. A new problem they face is how to mark students' course work now that it could have been produced by generative AI.

Lecturers pointed to conflicting advice from managers and exam regulators on this topic. Furthermore, there were questions about the long-term impact on the quality of education if more AI tools were to be introduced.

As a result of these high profile and glaring issues, there is a heightened urgency to the development of responses. For example, the Equity officer cited the union's campaign to update copyright laws¹⁰ to protect creators and learnings from the industrial action taken by writers and actors in Hollywood over the use of AI.

AI-powered worker surveillance

Union reps in other sectors reported how AI was intensifying an age-old concern for workers: surveillance and intrusions on autonomy and privacy.

A civil servant said that software-based workplace surveillance appeared to be "driven by a lack of trust in staff and pressures on budgets which require everyone to work even harder". They reported it had a counterproductive effect on employee morale.

A union rep at a large delivery company said:

"My colleagues have experienced the overbearing use of technology to push for better performance. Workers are now issued with electronic devices with GPS trackers. If we stop for one minute a yellow dot comes up on a map – and it is reported to a manager."

The rep reported how electronic surveillance was having a dehumanising effect on workers, with unfair disciplinary measures being taken due to data-based systems failing to understand contextual issues:

"There may be very good reasons for a one-minute stop. For example, you could be talking to a customer. The new system can lead to people being hauled in for a conversation and told 'you stopped for fifteen minutes over the course of a week; effectively you weren't working then.' They are asked to justify themselves."

According to workers at a large manufacturing site, this dehumanising effect is also present in HR practices:

"The risk is that we are losing the human elements in HR through automation and remoteness. There is no benefit of the doubt, no grey area. I know we are told that computers can't get it wrong, but they can get it wrong. They are just doing what they are told. There's no human element in there."

In 2022, the TUC warned that intrusive worker surveillance tech driven by AI risked "spiralling out of control" without stronger regulation to protect workers. Polling conducted by Britain Thinks, revealed 60 per cent of workers believed they have been subject to some form of surveillance and monitoring at their current or most recent job.¹¹

In 2021, the All Party Parliamentary Group of the Future of Work reported the impact of surveillance on workers, finding that "pervasive monitoring and target setting technologies, in particular, are associated with pronounced negative impacts on mental and physical wellbeing as workers experience the extreme pressure of constant, real-time micro-management and automated assessment."¹²

Automating decision making

Alongside generative AI and AI-enabled surveillance, workplaces are rolling out 'automated decision-making' (ADM) systems with impacts on worker autonomy, quality of work and workloads.

A civil servant handling sensitive case work issues said that ADM was having the effect of putting more pressure on the workers, rather than alleviating it.

They stated that the system's crude tracking did not account for qualitative aspects of different casework. The system "picked up when you start a piece of work and when you end it but not the middle bit when you're considering the detailed legal side" they said.

Managers were then subjecting workers to disciplinary and performance management processes based on this simplistic data, claiming that workers were taking longer than necessary without the requisite context.

One former worker at an electricity company reported that he and hundreds of other colleagues were made redundant by their employer who used an algorithmic analysis to inform the redundancy decisions.

"We were told by the managers 'we've used the algorithm before, it's tried and tested, it's very accurate in its predictions'. But what I'm hearing is they realise they've made a massive mistake. They are now looking at recruiting people again".

Staff at a manufacturing plant, who were highly skilled in utilising machines, reported that AI was being added to ageing automated machinery, with the result that it did not always work.

"If the new AI system encounters a problem," said one worker, "it then asks staff to take over from there. Any time it had something it didn't know it would say 'you can have it back now.'"

These cases demonstrated a recurrent theme from the focus groups: that managers and employers often may not fully understand the technologies and its applications to work processes.

Whether AI is generating text and images, monitoring workers or taking decisions, it is having a significant impact on all areas of work. Some of these will relate to the regulatory roles of the Welsh Government and its sponsored bodies. FE lecturers' concern about assessing course work is such an example, which could be a matter for Qualifications Wales to consider.

It is likely that other instances will arise in other parts of the devolved public sector. Therefore, **we recommend that the Welsh Government and the WPC consider AI's impact on devolved regulation related to the workplace, for example in education and health.**

Tackling the information asymmetry in the workplace

Employers may not have a full understanding of the function and effect of AI technologies, either bought off the shelf or developed in house. Yet there are still significant information asymmetries for workers who are affected by the technologies.

To tackle this, work has been undertaken by the trade union movement to enhance the understanding of trade unionists.

At three of the six focus groups participants were provided with copies of Wales TUC¹³ and Workforce Partnership Council¹⁴ materials relating to AI and new technology. Our aim was to evaluate how effective the documents were in providing useful and practical information to reps to use in the workplace.

At a meeting of trade union tutors a presentation based on the TUC's 'When AI is the Boss' was given. One of the participants praised the material and its associated e-learning module, which was designed with reps in mind.

More generally, participants said they found the materials useful and informative and they offered suggestions on how to further improve them. On the one hand, that it would be beneficial to have shorter, introductory information. Equally, senior reps and full time officers said that they needed materials that were more targeted and reflected the specific use of AI in their sector.

All the participants were active trade unionists, who understood the general importance of AI's challenges, but simply did not have the time or incentive to engage with long or untailed resources on the subject.

This feedback echoes concerns in a resolution agreed at the TUC's Congress in 2023 which read:

"Congress believes there is also a growing problem in the lack of knowledge and policy surrounding the development of technologies like AI and that the labour movement must improve our resources if we are to confront the inappropriate use of these technologies in the workplace."

Taken together, these findings demonstrate a clear demand for more materials on AI, so **as a next step, Wales TUC plans to producing further targeted resources and training for trade union reps.**

Furthermore **we recommend that the Welsh Government and WPC further develop, promote and monitor the use of guidance for best practice on worker participation.** See the 'next steps and recommendations' section below for more details.

Equalities and wider social harms are a cross cutting concern

Running throughout the varied experiences described above are cross cutting concerns. The impact of AI on workers with protected characteristics is a notable example.

It is widely accepted that AI tools can exhibit bias and produce discriminatory effects in the absence of appropriate governance and usage in hiring, firing and performance management.

According to the House of Commons science and technology committee, "Algorithms, in looking for and exploiting data patterns, can sometimes produce flawed or biased 'decisions' ... that can result, for example, in race or gender discrimination in recruitment processes."¹⁵

A specific concern was the deferring of judgement and decision-making to computer systems, removing contextually relevant information.

For the participants in our research, the use of de-contextualised data to aid or make decisions raised concerns regarding prejudice. A worker in the logistics sector cited how the blanket application of algorithmically determined targets are "set regardless of age or disability" and that "people are managed out if they can't meet their target" regardless of other factors.

This appears to run contrary to the Information Commissioner's Office guidance on fairness in AI that states that "Context is key: the conditions under which decision-making takes place is equally important as the decision-making process itself."¹⁶

A trade union official said that he had seen how algorithmically determined targets could discriminate against people with protected characteristics.

"If someone is pregnant their ability to do work quickly may be lower," he said, "but the algorithm doesn't take this into account and the worker will be penalised as a result".

Wider social harms were raised by participants. A journalist cited concerns regarding editorial integrity and the health of the information ecosystem consumed by the public.

"When it comes to the data scraping which informs generative AI models, these are influenced by biases and prejudices in existing materials. If there is far less human involvement in creating news reports, then these biases will be reinforced. It's quite scary and a big issue."

The impact of AI on the Welsh language was discussed in terms of workers and users of public services. Concerns were raised about the ability of large language models to properly understand informal written Welsh - it was stated that this could be a problem if public bodies relied on AI tools to analyse responses to public consultations and risked ignoring some people's views.

Whether it relates to decision-making in the workplace or creating news articles, workers are concerned that AI could increase inequality in the labour market and society. This concern bridged into perhaps the

largest issue of concern for workers of rapid technological change, and that has been the topic of intense public discussion: job losses and displacement.

A photographer told us “AI is being used to create photographic images. This is a threat to photographers’ work opportunities.”

A college lecturer asked whether his course notes would be used as “a source of material for AI software to make me redundant?”

One full time official for a retail sector union said there had been a “massive” recent layoff of staff due to new technology, including AI, saying that “at one time 1,000 people were working at a large superstore. Now it’s 250 and they are mostly part time workers.”

This intersects with equalities concerns, as more vulnerable workers may be most affected.

A 2019 study by the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce found about 75,000 jobs as sales assistants or checkout operators previously taken by women have gone in the last seven years due to automation and e-commerce.

While men lost 33,000 of the jobs over the period 2011 to 2018, these were largely offset by increases in roles in warehouses and as delivery drivers¹⁷. However, a retail worker union officer told us that many of these jobs are precarious and outsourced, meaning that reaching and organising these workers is particularly hard for union reps.

Recent research suggests that ‘professional occupations’ are most exposed to AI. The UK government found that this was the case “particularly for those [jobs] associated with more clerical work and across finance, law and business management roles.”

The impact by gender is highly differentiated, with women generally significantly more exposed to AI related impact than men.¹⁸ Notably, these private sector industries tend to have very low union density.

Across all areas of employment, AI is having a significant and varied impact on a range of different workers. Therefore, **as a next step, Wales TUC will continue to monitor the development and impact of AI in the workplace.**

Worker voice in shaping workplace technologies

Our research found widespread frustration from workers about limitations and exercising their voice and negotiating technology at work.

Automation supplanting human judgement

According to reps, technologies were being introduced into the workplace by employers with the stated goal of improving accuracy and efficiency. However, a weak understanding and improper application of the technologies and failure to incorporate worker insight by employers was leading to an environment where workers are further disempowered.

Retail workers cited that they often had good evidence that AI-generated targets did not sufficiently allow for the tasked activity but had limited ways to challenge management. One retail worker said:

“People are being disciplined for failing targets. But when we challenge employers about inaccurate task time targets, they say ‘AI is cleverer than you.’”

A local government worker cited an example where a pregnant colleague had been penalised for failing to meet a target that did not incorporate reasonable adjustments.

Listening to workers

Processes to introduce new technology are marked by an absence of participation and transparency. Multiple workers cited that they did not have access or influence over what data was used and what parameters helped establish the targets.

Reps cited having limited purchase on shaping the introduction and deployment of technologies, and difficulty in breaking through to managers and employers about the human decisions behind seemingly ‘objective’ algorithmic targets.

This was particularly acute in highly competitive sectors such as retail. One union official said:

“As unions, we don’t have access to the employers in terms of negotiating the introduction of technology. We are involved, but it’s such a competitive marketplace that technology is rolled out regardless of unions’ views. The companies buy the technology and just go ahead and introduce it.”

They added that sometimes there was a “shambolic” consultation, which did not offer meaningful engagement. For example, one



nationwide grocer introduced technologies for shoppers to scan their own groceries as they went through the store, without any consultation with unions. The official said the attitude of the retailers is merely stating “This is what we intend to do”.

Many examples from our research cited how a worker-centric approach to AI development and deployment could be beneficial for all stakeholders. Or how overlooking the skills and insights workers bring, and an over reliance on error prone systems, led to poor decision-making with damaging effects.

For example, a civil servant working on sensitive casework for members of the public cited the error rate of a new system that was promised to improve the service:

“As part of our work we pay fees to expensive expert external service providers. The system is now automated – ‘untouched by human hands.’ But it has a fault rate of 19 per cent! That’s compared to a 3 per cent fault rate for those payments which are manually inputted.”

At a large heavy industry site, health and safety reps cited a case where new technologies were installed without due engagement of the workforce leading to major challenges. For example, one worker recounted the almost comical story of the

installation of a new operating desk to help automate a complicated piece of machinery. He said:

“They asked a member of staff to sit at the operating desk in the pulpit so they could design it around him. However, he was 6’ 10”. Now I can’t use the operating desk without standing up!”

At this same site, reps reported that technology contributes to a growing distance between the workforce and management. According to the workers, it was undermining health and safety reporting, as well as exacerbating inefficiencies.

For example, a previously simple system for reporting and escalating accidental health and safety ‘near misses’ had been replaced:

“The new system is semi-automated on a computer. It prompts you and there are drop down boxes. It determines the level of investigation according to how serious the incident was. But it is too complex and it puts people off. We have criticised the system over and over again at the health and safety committee.”

The system was introduced without consultation and now the workers fear that incidents are not being reported.

This unilateral approach contrasts with other comparative nations. In Germany, for example, 'works councils' are legally able to be established at firm level in cooperation with trade unions to represent worker interests. This includes engaging employer funded independent experts to provide technical advice on understanding and negotiating digital technologies.

In summary, the ability to exercise worker voice and participation was generally reported as low. However, experience of negotiating new technologies varied across sectors, especially between manufacturing on the one hand and the creative industries on the other.

When used in conjunction with industrial processes, the union saw AI as the latest in a long line of technologies which could automate tasks. They reflected on many decades of technological development and automation. One said:

"In the 1990s when new machinery was installed, staff were given extra money as their jobs required more training and more skill."

They said that consultation had worsened, but the union still had enough strength and technical knowledge of the workplace and relevant regulations to intervene, as this testimony shows:

"when new software is introduced you're told 'this is it' [...] There's no engagement really, workers are left alone on the shop floor. People feel undervalued. Sometimes a new system was put in and we were told to get on with it. Until it's pointed out to them that it's breaking health and safety law."

As such, these manufacturing unions - with high union density and experience of industrial relations - were already equipped with some of the organising and negotiating techniques and knowledge of legal protections to engage with management.

By contrast, workers and unions without significant experience of collective organising regarding technology have had to respond to a dramatically changed environment, produce new policy and guidance for members, as well as engage in wider political campaigning.

In conclusion, despite the challenges, unions are responding to the introduction of AI. They are using tried and trusted procedures and developing new ones, all with the aim of ensuring the new tools benefit all workers. Therefore, **as a next step, Wales TUC will continue supporting the development and advocacy of trade union policy ideas that protect and extend workers' rights and workplace empowerment.**

Legislating for worker voice

In addition to the need for developing capabilities among trade unionists, it is noteworthy that the current and prospective legal and enforcement regimes frustrate worker empowerment.

For example, the UK government's Data Protection and Digital Information Bill is the only AI specific legislation to come forward this parliament. The Bill proposes to weaken the requirements for consultation, human review of automated decision-making, as well as restricting access to data that can help workers understand on what basis they are being managed.

At the time of publishing this report the Bill is entering the House of Lords stage of the legislative process.

Initiatives to address consultation on AI have also arisen in the trade union movement. The TUC called for a statutory duty to consult trade unions before an employer introduces AI and automated decision-making systems.

The TUC have also instigated the drafting of an AI and Employment Bill which includes the right to disconnect, digital rights to improve transparency around use of surveillance tech, and a universal right to human review of high-risk decisions made by technology.

These areas will be very important for workers in Wales, therefore **we recommend that the Welsh Government continues to seek to influence the UK government on non-devolved matters that will affect workers in Wales in relation to AI.**



Worker-led uses and getting on the front foot

Worker-led innovation

While concerned about the unaccountable ways in which AI is rolled out in many workplaces, reps and officials expressed the desire to build a positive approach to AI and digitalisation generally.

A full-time officer said, “unions must accept that not all AI is bad - like the use of diagnostic tools in healthcare. If it improves patient outcomes it is a good thing,” she said.

The key concern was how technology can be shaped by humans and not the other way around, and how the benefits and risks will be distributed. As another officer said:

“AI should be the cart and the unions should be the horses leading it. But right now we are being dragged along. The question is how do we put ourselves back in front of the cart?”

Faced with such frustrations, some workers are seeking to get on the front foot and to use AI in a worker centric way. At a further education college, a joint union-management pilot is under development for staff to use AI tools with a focus on its use to reduce and manage workloads.

A rep at the college said:

“AI is probably coming to the classroom, so with this pilot we will try to get hold of it. One of our opportunities is that we drive it.”

The reps at the college recognise the risk of further embedding AI - from it being co-opted by management or creating further problems for workloads and admin. But they are committed to getting on the front foot of a technological change. As one of the reps said, “‘Improve, don’t dehumanise’, that should be the aim of any innovative technology!”

Discussions about the pilot raised wider issues about the implications of AI. As noted above there was concern at inconsistent advice and statements from exam boards and others on the admissibility of students’ work which had used AI, and where responsibility sat for tackling plagiarism.

Another important example of worker engagement is taking place at a national level. The WPC has established a working group on AI with equal numbers of seats for unions, employers and the Welsh Government. The group will review progress against actions of the WPC report ‘The future of work: the impact of innovative technology on the workforce’.

Furthermore, the group will consider the implications of AI for the public sector workforce and determine the principles, information, advice, and guidance needed to embed social partnership and employee rights in employers’ practices.¹⁹

AI and collective bargaining

Workers are looking to flagship examples of effective collective bargaining that deal with the role of AI. For example, reps in the creative industries cited the September 2023 agreement reached by the Writers Guild of America with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers after a high profile five-month strike²⁰. The agreement has specific provisions regarding AI and protections for creative workers.

Participants in a focus group of officers from creative sector unions spoke in detail about developing collective bargaining which fully incorporated the challenges posed by generative AI.

Along with new provisions for specific technologies, existing core trade union practises retained their value. One officer

said that in her experience of representing call centre staff the “key union principles remain paramount” such as “reasonable practice”, which in a call centre could be used to challenge a range of AI management techniques, such as overbearing surveillance.

However, it was acknowledged that given the variability and relative complexity of AI, trade unionists would need to develop better understanding and tactics to understand and respond.

Consequently, **as a next step, Wales TUC will support affiliated unions to share experience and best practices on understanding, using and negotiating AI, including its incorporation in collective bargaining agreements.**



Next steps and recommendations

The following next steps and recommendations are made by the report's authors based on the research findings. They seek to support the delivery of the specific aims within the 2022 Wales TUC resolution on AI.

Next steps for Wales TUC

The Wales TUC plans to take the following steps:

A. Produce further targeted resources and training for trade union reps

It is essential for shop floor workers to understand when and how these technologies are being used and what means can be deployed to negotiate with employers.

Regularly updated training resources and programmes are needed that:

- Are audience specific e.g. for lay reps or officers
- Are sector specific, targeting particular types of AI and digital technologies workers may encounter
- Are introductory, practical and related to familiar means of negotiation, for example equalities, health and safety, pay and conditions as well as specific concerns related to AI and digitalisation such as data protection and copyright.

B. Continue to monitor the development and impact of AI in the workplace and conduct further research

AI applications are rapidly proliferating and changing as the technology evolves. In the absence of clear requirements for employers to divulge what technologies have been deployed, the Wales TUC will need to maintain information-gathering capacity, in order to inform opportunities for action.

This may include:

- Further focus groups and surveys of workers, by sector and by protected characteristics, including follow ups on the participants of this research.
- Research in sectors which are likely to be severely affected by AI and where unionisation rates are currently low. This may support a significant opportunity to recruit new workers into the trade union movement.

C. Continue supporting the development and advocacy of trade union policy ideas that protect and extend workers' rights and workplace empowerment

The current legal regime frustrates the effective empowerment of workers generally, and specifically with regards to digitalisation and AI.

- Wales TUC will consider how to further support the adoption of new practices and policy initiatives to address this.

D. Support affiliated unions to share experience and best practices on understanding, using and negotiating AI, including its incorporation in collective bargaining agreements.

Establishing regular structures for convening affiliates and trade unionists will help to accelerate learning and build capacity across the movement.

- A regular working group of Welsh affiliates could be established to share and collaborate on AI in the workplace.
- Developing best practice and sector specific guidance to support affiliate unions to incorporate data, technology and AI related issues into collective bargaining.

Recommendations for the Welsh Government and Workforce Partnership Council

Working in social partnership the Welsh Government and the WPC's AI working group should:

1. Further develop, promote and monitor the use of guidance for best practice on worker participation

- Social partners should build on the existing WPC agreement to make a reality of worker engagement on the introduction or deployment of technology in the workplace. These should include a wide spectrum of issues, including equalities, working conditions, skills and transparency.
- The devolved Welsh public sector should be an exemplar in its adoption of AI. The existing WPC agreement should be

implemented in concert with other steps to protect workers and improve services when new technologies are introduced. This includes sufficient training on risks; regular reviews and training on requisite skills.

- Consider the use of levers for incentivising and rewarding best practices by employers, including through procurement and conditionality for financial support in line with the principles of the Economic Contract between businesses and the Welsh Government.

2. Consider AI's impact on devolved regulation related to the workplace.

- Develop context-specific understanding and concerns in different domains. For example, educators highlighted that exam boards and others will need to revise procedures to respond to the use of AI.

3. Influence the UK government on non-devolved matters that will affect workers in Wales.

Where possible the Welsh Government should engage with non-devolved processes that will affect workers in Wales.

- Maintain a watching brief on relevant processes and legislation, for example UK government's Data Protection and Digital Information Bill.
- Intervene to make representations, and use Welsh Government powers where appropriate to influence non-devolved legislation

Appendix

Wales TUC Congress Resolution 2022: Data and AI

Congress acknowledges that the capability of new technology to capture, store and process large amounts of data has changed greatly in recent years and has accelerated the development of applicable artificial intelligence (AI).

Congress notes that this may create potential opportunities for innovation across all sectors of the economy, however Congress further notes careful consideration must be given to the potential unintended consequences of algorithm based decision-making AI.

Congress believes that workers must be informed from the outset when any new form of new technology is introduced into the workplace and understands that new technology can present specific challenges.

Congress also believes that all workers should be able to access the skills and qualifications required to adapt to the changing world of work.

Congress is therefore calling on Welsh Government to develop a framework in which the following may be applicable as considerations when organisations are seeking support, financial or otherwise, for the development of new technology in the workplace:

- Worker Voice - workers are central to the discussions regarding the implementation of new technology;
- Data Justice – data collected from workers is with consent and all efforts are taken to eliminate the consequence of algorithmic bias;

- Data Surveillance – data gathered does not adversely impact workers;
- Job Displacement – worker involvement with training opportunities to be provided and ongoing investment in skills, including through continued commitment to Union Learning;
- Worker-centric environment – Adherence to well-being, health and safety of workers.

Furthermore, Congress calls on all relevant and responsible parties, including but not limited to Welsh Government, to:

- Campaign to amend elements of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988;
- Co-ordinate a global union response with sister unions nationally and internationally.

Notes

¹ 'People Powered Technology', TUC

² *ibid*

³ Wikipedia

⁴ Wikipedia

⁵ Concise Oxford English Dictionary

⁶ Wikipedia

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ Welsh Government

⁹ [Public call for government regulation of generative AI at work, Prospect](#)

¹⁰ [Stop AI Stealing the Show, Equity](#)

¹¹ [Intrusive worker surveillance tech risks "spiralling out of control" without stronger regulation, TUC](#)

¹² [The New Frontier: Artificial Intelligence at Work, All Party Parliamentary Group of the Future of Work](#)

¹³ ['Negotiating the Future of Work: Automation and New Technology', Wales TUC](#)

¹⁴ For more information on the WPC agreement cited here read ['AI, automation and digitalisation in the public sector,' Wales TUC](#)

¹⁵ [Algorithms in Decision-making, House of Commons](#)

¹⁶ [How do we ensure fairness in AI? Information Commissioner's Office](#)

¹⁷ [108,000 retail jobs lost to automation and e-commerce since 2011, RSA](#)

¹⁸ [The potential impact of AI on UK employment and the demand for skills, UK Government](#)

¹⁹ Artificial Intelligence – Working Group Update, WPC

²⁰ [2023 MBA Tentative Agreement, Writers' Guild of America](#)

Acknowledgements:

This report is produced by the Wales TUC supported by Connected by Data and Dr. Juan Grigera, King's College London.

Thanks to everyone who helped in the preparation of this report with their advice and practical help, including staff at Connected By Data, TUC, Wales TUC and participants at the Schaffareit AI conference. Particular thanks to all those who contributed to the focus groups for their time and insight.

Authors

Adam Cantwell-Corn, Connected by Data
Dr Juan Grigera, King's College London
Ceri Williams, Wales TUC

About us

The Wales TUC is the voice of Wales at work. With 48 member unions, the Wales TUC represents around 400,000 workers. We campaign for a fair deal at work and for social justice at home and abroad.

Connected By Data campaign to put community at the centre of data narratives, practices and policies by advocating for collective and open data governance. They want communities to have a powerful say in decisions about data so that it is used to create a just, equitable and sustainable world.

Design by: Gavin Pearce, Wales TUC

Photos: All photos are for illustrative purposes only. Photos that are not credited are stock photos depicting models, and are from the Trades Union Congress, iStock, Shutterstock & Storyblocks.

© 2024 Wales TUC

This publication is also available in the Welsh language.

All TUC publications can be provided for dyslexic or visually impaired readers in an agreed accessible format, on request, at no extra cost.

Contact: Ceri Williams

e: wtuc@tuc.org.uk t: 029 2034 7010

Published by:
Wales TUC Cymru,
1 Cathedral Road,
Cardiff CF11 9SD
www.wtuc.org.uk