



# 15 Rights and responsibilities



Technique sheet

Problem-based learning resources

### Introduction

You have rights and responsibilities at work. These rights can be the result of people fighting for them over many years so take them seriously and protect them! Your responsibilities to your colleagues and your employer are also important so make sure you know what is expected of you and that you do this to the best of your ability.

<https://theconversation.com/fair-work-its-all-about-political-spin-in-industrial-relations-2084>

necessary to do your job safely. Note that some of these employment-related rights (e.g. holiday pay, pension contributions) may not apply to freelancers who might do a particular job for a company (e.g. maintain the heating system) but are not directly employed by them. You also have a right to be treated equally by your employer, and people around you, irrespective of your gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, age or any disability. These rights are guaranteed by law.

- Make sure you understand your rights at work and that these are governed by national and, in some cases, international law.

### What are my rights at work?

As an employee you have the right to be paid the correct rate for the job including holidays and usually pension contributions. You can also expect career development, all training

### What can my employer expect from me?

Your employer can expect you to turn up on time, work the hours you are contracted for, wear appropriate clothes (or a uniform), keep work

information confidential, treat colleagues with respect and behave professionally, and safely at all times. Remember all the laws that exist outside the workplace, still operate within it so use of drugs, violence, theft, or fraud can be reported to the police. Your employer will almost certainly co-operate in your prosecution.

- Make sure you act professionally at work. Your employer can expect you to follow reasonable instructions within the bounds of your contract and can take action if you fail to do this.

### What happens if there is a problem with my work?

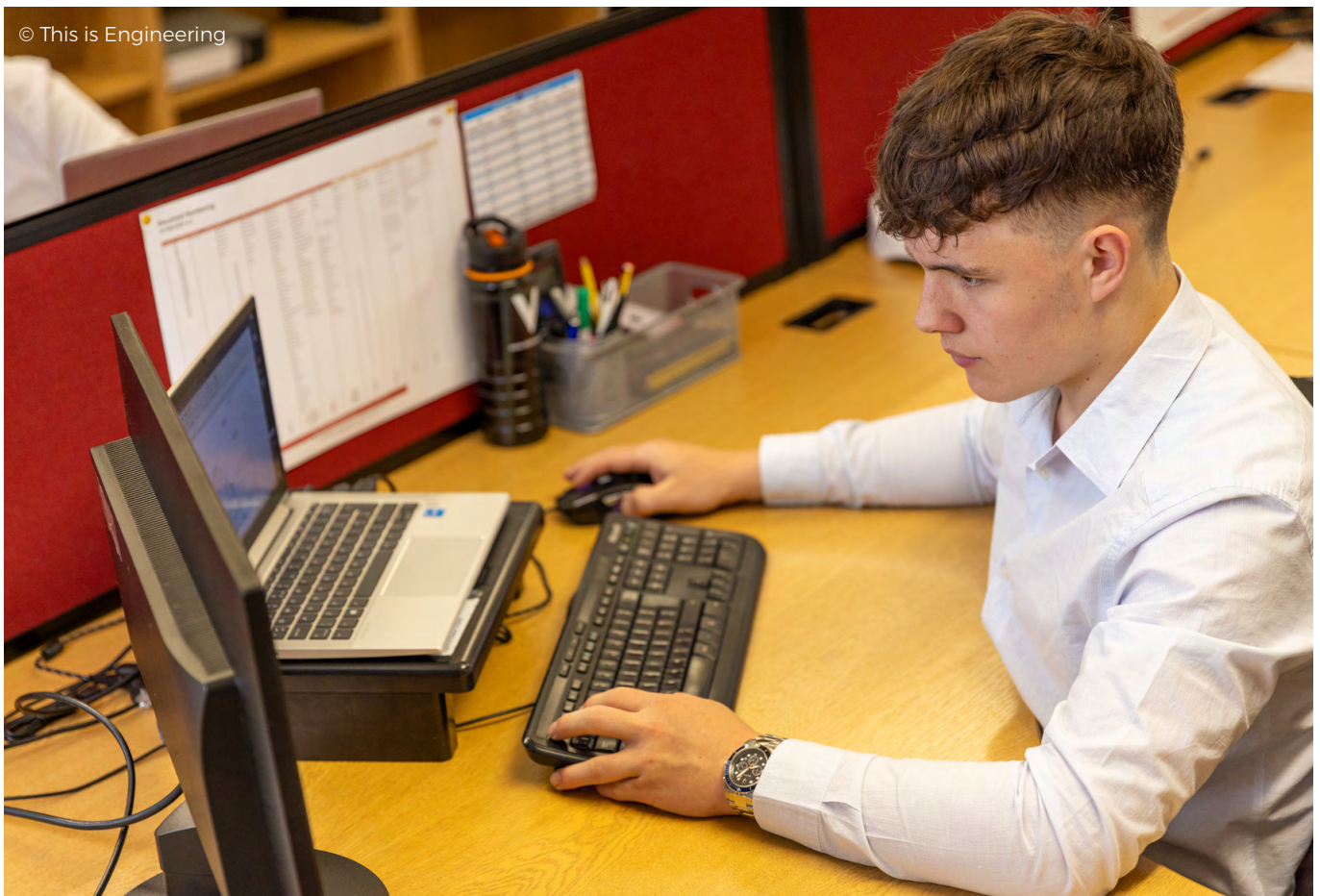
Good employers understand that some training is needed on the job and that performance will improve over time. However, sometimes employee performance can be so low that it is unacceptable. Some employees may contravene their employer's rules (including Equality and Diversity or Health and Safety issues). These problems will not be ignored, and a process will usually start with a verbal warning. The warning should also describe how to improve. If this fails, the next stage is a written warning and if the problem persists the employer may consider specialist training for the employee to solve it. Ultimately the employee can be dismissed.

- Make sure you understand what your employer wants from you and take advantage of training and support to improve your performance when required.

### What happens if there is a problem with my employer?

Most employers and employees have a good relationship. Unhappy employees tend to move, and bad employers find they lose all their staff! It is in everyone's interest to co-operate. However, there are times (particularly during times of economic difficulty or commercial change) that employers and employees can be in conflict. Your employer will almost certainly have systems to help with this and you should use these if possible. Unions are also powerful advocates of employee rights and have specialist staff who can support you when things are difficult. To access this support, you usually need to be a member of the union. Consider joining a union when you arrive at a workplace. Unions are better able to argue for pay and improvements in conditions if more people are registered members.

- Make sure you use the systems provided to solve problems with your employer. Union members can also access professional and legal support from their union to help with this.



## What if I want to change jobs?

You have a right to resign at any point, but you will have to tell your employer in time – this is called giving notice and the time you have to work after telling them is called your notice period. The exact length of your notice period will be given in your contract of employment. In the worst instances, the company may cease trading, or you may be made redundant. You should be given notice of this (again the length of time will be specified in your contract) and you may be entitled to compensation. Even after you have left a company it is good to maintain a level of professionalism about your time there. Do not criticize, or gossip about your previous employer or access confidential company documents or records. You should also hand over any equipment they have provided in good workable condition.

- Make sure you think about your options beyond your current job, and it is wise to keep an eye on other companies in the same line of business.

## What if I want a pay rise or to work part time?

You should be able to negotiate your pay and conditions with your employer, but they have the right to decline your requests. If you are aware that some colleagues are being paid more than you or the typical rate for similar employees in different companies is much higher your arguments will be much stronger. Again, unions can be helpful in these circumstances. Note that it is illegal for an employer to give different rates of pay to employees doing the same, or broadly similar, jobs on the basis of gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, age or any disability.

- Make sure your pay and working conditions matches your knowledge, skills, qualifications, and experience. You are entitled to a fair pay and conditions package for the work you do.



### Check yourself

**You should be able to answer these questions easily after reading this sheet.**

1. What rights do you have at work?
2. What can your employer expect from you at work?



### Taking it further

**These activities will deepen your understanding of this topic.**

1. What are the policies at your workplace or college for the rights and responsibilities mentioned in this sheet (e.g. equality, timekeeping, rates of pay)? Where could you find out about them and what do they say? Are there any parts of the policies that surprise you or make you think? Do they seem 'fair' and do you find it easy to follow them all? Might you have to change your behaviour in some areas or have different expectations of others?
2. What is the expected rate of pay for an engineer in your current situation? How do you expect it will change over the next few years as you gain qualifications and experience?
3. Which unions represent workers in your industry? Look online or there may be a union noticeboard or representative at your place of work. What help do they offer? How much are union dues and what are they fighting for? Consider joining a relevant union.