



CEC Special Report

Organising in a Changing Economy: New Rights, Skills and Technology



**MAKE
WORK
BETTER**

GMB Congress 2026

CEC Special Report

Table of Contents

List of acronyms and terms.....	1
Summary of policy adopted.....	2
Introduction	4
1. How work is changing in 2026	5
2. Artificial Intelligence at Work.....	8
3. Skills and rebuilding an industrial economy	17
4. Conclusion	21
Appendix 1 – Employment Act 2025 Reforms – estimated dates effective from.....	22
Appendix 2 – Negotiating introduction of AI and other tech at work.....	23

List of acronyms and terms

AI	Artificial Intelligence technologies
AV	Automated Vehicles
CAC	Central Arbitration Committee
CGIL	Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro union (Italy)
CWA	Communication Workers of America union (US)
ERA	Employment Rights Act
GMB@Work	GMB’s workplace organising principles, which can be found at: www.gmb.org.uk/about/how-we-work/gmb-at-work
HR	Human Resources
HPC	Hinkley Point C nuclear power station
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (United States)
LGBT+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender inclusive
MPs	Members of Parliament
NHS	National Health Service
SEIU	Service Employees International Union (US)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
TULCRA	Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992
UCAS	University and Colleges Admissions Service
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
US	United States of America

Summary of policy adopted

To make the most of new workers' rights, union freedoms and continue the fight to make work pay, GMB will:

- Build on our union density in our workplaces
- Build on our collective agreements to account for increased statutory rights
- Build on new access rights and lower statutory union recognition thresholds to secure new collective agreements that give facility time for our representatives
- Urge Labour deliver its Make Work Pay Manifesto commitments in-full

Collective bargaining on AI and other technology at work

- GMB will develop and signpost to resources to empower GMB Reps to scrutinise, organise around and collectively bargain over the introduction of AI and new technology in their workplace.
- GMB will develop our own Model Agreement on introduction of AI and new workplace technology at work, learning from good practice in our union and unions internationally
- GMB will not be afraid to stand up and take action to oppose imposition of AI and new technology or its unethical use where there is collective will from our members

GMB's "Jobs First" Demands of Government and Policymakers on AI

- A statutory right to consultation when employers wish to transfer tasks from workers to automatic processes
- Mandate private sector employers to secure prior union agreement before introducing new technology and guarantee paid retraining or redeployment for workers.
- Place stricter regulation for using AI in the public sector to guarantee that AI will not replace staff or affect the public without human oversight.

- Greater transparency and protection for workers and the public from AI bias and the use of their data by new technology.
- Help workers whose roles are displaced or replaced by Automated Vehicle (AV) technology through a "Just Transition Fund," financed by a levy or tax on AV operators.

GMB's "Jobs First" demands of Government and Policymakers on industrial skills:

- A statutory right to paid time off for workers to attend learning or training where jobs are at risk from technological change or meeting Net-Zero commitments
- Sectoral Job Plans that identify current and future skills needs and ensures accessible routes into new jobs
- Ensure employers in receipt of public money guarantee job retention or redeployment opportunities before cutting jobs
- A UCAS-style clearing house for UK-wide apprenticeships
- The 'reindustrialisation' of apprenticeships through increased learning time spent on practical workplace-based learning, increased government and employer funding and working with unions to align curriculums to skills that are in economic demand and strategy.

Introduction

- 1.1 In several times during our history, GMB members have been at the forefront of a changing world of work. From winning the Eight Hour Day in the Beckton Gasworks and the first equal pay of equal value case for women workers, to being the union that organises in the most anti-union employers in the world today like Amazon.
- 1.2 This report explores what challenges our union will need to face to be at the forefront of today's changing world of work. It does not seek to amend how GMB organises, set out by our GMB@Work principles, but it seeks to provide information, tools and policies to help us apply those principles to the challenges ahead.
- 1.3 Changes to the UK's economy over the next 10 years will be the most consequential for GMB members since the 1970s, bringing industrial challenges but also real opportunity to keep building GMB as a strong, organised campaigning trade union.
- 1.4 For the past decade, GMB and other unions have fought an uphill struggle to improve rights at work from an ever-harsher neoliberal economy which has devalued our members' wages and conditions through policies like austerity and outsourcing. Labour's new Employment Rights Act is the latest victory, intended to 'level the playing-field' and will be the biggest progress in workers' rights in 50 years.
- 1.5 However, employment rights can only benefit the working-class if we have jobs in the first place. Without a rebalanced economy where employers are required to properly value our members and their voice in their world of work, we will not make work better for all. Employment rights are also only as strong as our ability to enforce them as trade unions. We cannot organise around them to make work better for all if union membership remains only a fifth (22%) of employees in the UK.¹
- 1.6 Despite new workers' rights, changes to the UK economy risk tilting the balance in our economy even further away from workers' interests. More employers are intending to use new automative technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robotics to reduce reliance on human labour. Insufficient pro-worker measures in industrial and skills policy under this Labour Government risk even more decent, unionised jobs being offshored or laid off.
- 1.7 By remaining committed to our purpose and principles, GMB will come out of a changing economy stronger.

1. How work is changing in 2026

- 1.8 The Employment Rights Act (ERA) 2025 is expected to shape how unions including GMB will organise in many workplaces going forward. Appendix 1 of this report contains a table that estimates when these new rights will be effective from in the workplace, if not already effective by Congress 2026.
- 1.9 Key reforms for union organising will be a legal right for unions to enter workplaces to meet, represent and organise members, a duty on employers to inform workers of their right to join a union, lower thresholds for statutory union recognition and less restrictions on industrial action.
- 1.10 The first principle of GMB@Work is that the workplace is the building block of GMB, and our history shows that employment rights are only as effective as they are acted upon in the workplace. It was GMB organising – and subsequent Employment Tribunal case – that finally granted Uber’s private-hire drivers their workers’ rights to holiday pay and to be paid at least the national minimum wage.
- 1.11 ERA rights will give GMB reps and organisers a higher statutory floor of workers rights in which to negotiate with the employer from and removes some of the Tories’ red tape on unions’ ability to recruit, organise and take industrial action.
- 1.12 The ERA is not designed to hold back where GMB has already negotiated better. Labour’s Manifesto commitment to a new right of union access is a minimum-floor intended to overcome union-busting by powerful employers like Amazon and others who refuse to let unions speak to workers. Where GMB already has agreements with employers for accessing workplaces that are higher than the statutory floor, we should not allow employers to use it to water down more favourable terms.
- 1.13 If understood and utilised by members and reps who build GMB in the workplace, these new rights will allow us to improve where we are organised and organise where we are not. But the challenge is clear – just 12% of private sector workers are union members and over 80% of jobs in the private sector are not covered by collective agreements. If we do not fully utilise these new rights, individual workers will be left on their own to seek costly legal redress through an underfunded and under-resourced Tribunal system.

1.14 To make the most of new workers rights and union freedoms we will need to prioritise:

- **Build on union density in our workplaces**
- **Build on our collective agreements to account for increased statutory rights**
- **Build on access rights and lower statutory union recognition thresholds to secure new collective agreements that give facility time for our representatives**

Continuing the fight to Make Work Pay

- 1.15 The tumultuous politics currently affecting the UK and the world must not allow Labour to be distracted from delivering its Manifesto commitments to Make Work Pay in full. GMB will continue working to ensure the delivery of these wider commitments which have the potential to transform our members' world of work and properly rebalance the economy back towards those who make the wealth within it.
- 1.16 This includes Labour's plan to create a regulatory and enforcement unit for equal pay with involvement from unions, and measures to ensure that outsourcing of services can no longer be used to avoid paying equal pay, including for work of equal value, to women.
- 1.17 Labour must also press ahead with its commitment to require employers to create and maintain workplaces free from harassment, including by third parties, and its commitment to modernise health and safety guidance with reference to extreme temperatures, preventative action and other steps to ensure safety at work.
- 1.18 We will continue to fight an uphill battle to rebalance the economy in favour of working people if Labour does not implement in-full its Manifesto commitments on procurement and insourcing. Labour must deliver "the biggest wave of insourcing public services in a generation" and procurement reforms to "make sure that trade union recognition and access is valued and considered as part of the process of awarding public contracts and determining strategic suppliers, alongside other factors that demonstrate a commitment to good jobs."²
- 1.19 GMB urges the government to ensure its procurement reforms require:
- All contract bidders set out the proportion of their workforce that is covered

by collective bargaining arrangements with a trade union(s) and, where services may be further contracted, the same for their subcontractors.

- Trade union recognition and collective bargaining coverage should count favourably in tender assessments. And when contracting with suppliers who do not recognise an independent union for all their workers, contracts must include clauses to require contractors to agree voluntarily to access request(s) from independent union(s), before a CAC process needs to be used.
- Contracting authorities carry out and publish Equality Impact Assessments during pre-procurement preparation, and using findings to proactively build equalities requirements into procurements and eventual contracts to support equality for Black, women, LGBT+ and disabled workers.
- Contract holders act in good faith throughout the life of the contract including taking no steps to derecognise union(s) or reduce established facility time arrangements for union representatives.
- Contracting authorities being able to set periodic 'terms and conditions' updates to introduce higher employment standards during existing contracts if necessary.
- Contract holders employing a permanent workforce with decent pay, terms and conditions no less favourable than those established for work of the same character in the trade or industry concerned (including adherence to national collective agreements on working conditions)
- Contract holders hold a 'Local Labour Agreement' to create direct-employment in the local area and fully utilise UK supply chains as part of its business

2. Artificial Intelligence at Work

- 2.1 AI is a particularly powerful form of automative technology where computer systems carry out tasks usually expected to be carried out by a human. These include following instructions on how to interpret a set of information or data it is given (an 'Algorithm'). Generative AI creates new content powered by these algorithms such as text, images, video, audio or software code, and improves how it analyses over time and can even make predictions. This is a form of 'Machine Learning' and it powers everyday AI tools like ChatGPT and Microsoft Co-Pilot. GMB's Future of Work report to Congress 2022 contains helpful breakdown of other new technology terms and definitions.³
- 2.2 Investors globally have put nearly \$1.3 trillion into developing AI technology since 2013 – five times the investment that was put into NASA's Apollo program to put humans on the moon.⁴ Tech companies Meta, Alphabet (Google), Microsoft and Amazon collectively spending more than £481 billion on AI in 2026 alone.⁵
- 2.3 Our GMB@Work principles remind us that the employer has different interests to our members, and it is no different for why employers are investing in AI. UK workers have seen the highest increase in hours per person worked out of OECD countries while the UK was lowest of OECD countries for employers' investment in productivity – despite profit margins remaining healthy. Coupled with austerity, stagnating real wages and deindustrialisation, Capital has sent profits away to financial assets or share dividends rather than invest it in projects to increase production, supply and wages.⁶ In extreme cases, AI take-up could cause 'jobless growth' which the United States underwent after the 2001 recession and arguably still somewhat suffers from today.⁷
- 2.4 However, AI technology is not inherently an enemy of the worker – it's the boss's intentions that matter. AI can benefit work and genuinely improve productivity working with and alongside humans, but where its use is imposed by management and policymakers it carries real risks, which can be broadly categorised as:
- ⊗ Discriminatory access to, or consequences of, using AI for certain tasks
 - ⊗ Accountability, transparency and protections over information processed by AI
 - ⊗ Safety and security of workers, the public and the environment from use of AI
 - ⊗ Displacement or replacement of human labour from how and where AI is used.

- 2.5 Workers and communities must therefore be at the centre of any such digital transformation. Unions like GMB have a vital industrial role to play in negotiating safeguards, standards, and ethical frameworks. We will also need to make demands on public decisionmakers too in alliance with other unions, service users, community groups and digital rights organisations whose aims match our own.

How AI is already changing GMB members' workplaces

- 2.6 The impact of AI is a major concern of GMB members. Over half (54%) of members responding to GMB's AI survey think that AI will take away jobs in their workplace, with 40 per cent being concerned that AI will lead them to lose their own job.
- 2.7 Employer deployment of AI technology is happening in a significant minority of members' workplaces. Over a third (34%) of members said that their employer has introduced AI technology in their workplace.
- 2.8 Of where this is the case, a quarter (25%) said that AI technology is doing tasks that they would usually do in their job. Only 16 per cent of members were aware that their employer has offered or delivered any staff training, education or has policies on using AI at work. Most members were not aware whether GMB reps were consulted on workplace AI policies by the employer (80%).
- 2.9 Some employers are already using AI to track members activity at work in airport ground handling, car manufacturing, refuse collection, social care and private-hire.

GMB AI at Work members survey 2026	
How AI is changing GMB members work	How members think GMB can respond
"Medical Secretaries have already been in consultation for losing approximately 50% of medical secretaries and being replaced with AI." "I think its primarily being introduced to automate some systems and improve data analysis." "AI is predicting times spent at each client which is adding more clients to your daily visits and times that are unrealistic." "All of my calls are currently being scanned for trigger words that have generated negative reviews and of performance and created intense situations that did not exist." "It won't take away my job as it's quite physical covering numerous sites. However, it could quite possibly take away office staffs' jobs"	"The GMB could lead on developing a curriculum that would help its members learn more about AI." "Lobby for policies that guarantee artificial intelligence will only be used to improve things like productivity and data capture/analysis and will not be used for the eradication of job roles and to replace humans within the workplace" "Limit introduction of AI for monitoring & surveillance" "Ensure AI implementation is transparent, properly consulted on. There should be clear agreements requiring retraining, redeployment, and upskilling opportunities before roles are removed." "Scrutinise policy, procedures to ensure the workforce are adequately trained and there are adequate protections in place."

- 2.10 In the NHS, AI is being used to assist with tasks like triage, diagnostics, workforce planning, administrative work and clinical decision support. Transparency standards must be created so that NHS staff and patients always know when AI is being used and how decisions are made. A growing number of NHS staff are refusing to work on Palantir's health data platform over ethical concerns about the US AI firm, with MPs in Parliament warning that the NHS's decision to grant Palantir access to identifiable patient information is "dangerous".⁸
- 2.11 In social care, GMB members have already seen AI-powered Thermal Cameras for monitoring residents' falls and incidents being wrongly used by the employer to discipline and dismiss workers without set workplace policies.
- 2.12 In Local Government, some authorities are beginning to use AI 'machine learning' systems to run HR processes, welfare assessments, customer service interactions, rostering systems, and resource planning. These technologies are often being adopted without adequate workforce consultation, impact assessments, or guarantees on data protection and transparency.
- 2.13 In warehousing and logistics, employers are increasingly implementing AI and automative technology for route-planning software, in-cab driver monitoring and automating warehouse stock processes. 58 percent of logistics firms have used AI and automative technologies at scale in warehouses and distribution and a similar proportion of retailers said they would focus AI investment in this area too. Notably, Sainsburys' has announced the reduction of 300 head office jobs mostly in tech and data reporting. The grocer also confirmed it is using AI technology in store stock management to restock shelves quicker and deploy staff to focus on customer queries instead.
- 2.14 The use of AI in schools is rapidly growing but is inconsistent and limited consultation due to academisation. Jobs like school support staff have a relational element working with children which is hard for AI to replicate and imposing this technology without working with support staff risks further devaluing of the profession. GMB's survey of 100,000 school support staff has found that only 6 per cent of school support staff were consulted by their employer before new technology is introduced, despite some of our members already using new technologies in their jobs.⁹
- 2.15 Well-designed forms of new technology can improve education, but there are natural limits, and it cannot replace those relied upon to educate our children. The

government's plan to introduce artificial intelligence in classrooms must be done with the help of school support staff and GMB continues to stand ready to organise around the future of the school support profession.

- 2.16 Arguably, the greatest risk of AI displacing and replacing human roles soon is in Transport. Autonomous vehicles (AV) are already being trialled on the UK's roads and in transport hubs like Airports with ground-handling vehicles. Without any underpinning rights and legislation, many drivers in the UK will see their roles displaced or replaced with little to no support.
- 2.17 All operators must show what measures they are taking to support drivers in existing markets where they have been involved in the deployment of AV's. GMB private hire members have already articulated industrial demands for comprehensive, publicly funded retraining and reskilling programs for workers whose jobs are at risk. These must be designed in consultation with unions to ensure they provide genuine pathways to new, well-paying employment opportunities. Taxes on automated mileage or increased corporate tax on companies that benefit significantly from automation could be explored to ensure economic gains from automation are used to support displaced workers.

How AI may change the future of work

- 2.18 So far AI is reshaping employment through gradual restructuring rather than sudden mass displacement. The current and predicted impact is not that it will replace jobs, but restructure the labour market where some job roles are automated but more will be reorganized with new tasks.¹⁰
- 2.19 Roles affected will likely be entry-level administration/sales or professional clerical roles that contain routine, repetitive or rules-based tasks, or data analysis responsibilities. The only extreme exposure so far to AI has been in the tech industry itself, when the social media platform TikTok announced that it would dismiss hundreds of its content moderators as it shifted to AI.¹¹
- 2.20 Accountancy firm KPMG estimates 40 per cent of British jobs could experience some degree of AI-related disruption, but not job losses.¹² A four-year study by Kings College of online job postings to 2025 found that firms whose workforces are 'highly exposed' to AI have reduced total employment by 4.5 per cent on average. These were almost entirely entry-level roles which saw a £2,951 (6.3 per cent) decrease in advertised salaries on average.¹³

- 2.21 Claims that AI will be a job-creator should be treated with scepticism. The Economist magazine claimed that AI will create a “blue-collar bonanza”, increasing wages and demand for jobs by increasing productivity. However, economists point out that any positive impact of AI on wages, workloads and inequality will depend on employers using it to complement existing jobs and creating new jobs outside of the tech industry.¹⁴
- 2.22 Whereas ‘white-collar’ or professional occupations may see large parts of automated by AI but retrained to do new tasks, ‘blue-collar’ occupations may see employers intensify their workloads by using AI to track their performance or by making workers spend time inputting data to maintain and monitor AI systems. Roles suggested as likely being affected include factory workers, electrical/gas fitters, carers, school staff and maintenance workers.
- 2.23 There is also significant risk of worker ‘deskilling’ from AI: by removing complex decision-making responsibilities from more experienced workers and by replacing the entry-level roles where career starters would have previously been able to develop the foundational skills in their sectors. If AI tools are adopted carelessly, workers may also be wrongly blamed for ‘failing to spot’ AI’s mistakes.
- 2.24 The above scenarios may sound daunting. However, it is not inevitable if we maintain our record of being an organised, campaigning member-led trade union as set out in GMB@Work. GMB has roots in the first industrial revolution and have faced rapid technological change in the workplace before. At the start of the twentieth century’s ‘scientific and technological revolution’ coined by Irish scientist J. D. Bernal, unions were clear that in any second or third industrial revolution science can transform but humans must gain more leisure, consumables, and potential.
- 2.25 The trade union movement must reclaim its prior liberating, humanistic vision on technology and fight for AI technologies to operate for the benefit of people, not exploitation. GMB has long advocated for public ownership of the commanding heights of our economy and if AI is to command our economy, then we should demand the same – the public ownership and democratic control of emerging technologies.
- 2.26 Having this grounding vision is even more required considering growing concerns regarding the ethics around AI’s use by governments around the world. More than 200,000 have called on the UK government to break its contracts with US tech

company Palantir, whose AI software is used by Donald Trump's ICE immigration enforcement programme and has been listed by as a risk to human rights by the OECD due to its use by Israeli forces to harm civilians in Gaza.¹⁵ In the words of one Google DeepMind worker in the UK who voted to unionise after the Google's AI technology was found to have helped Israeli forces in Gaza: "I want AI to benefit humanity, not to facilitate a genocide."¹⁶

2.27 AI will also make a huge impact on our natural environment through high energy use, water consumption for data centre cooling and demands on critical minerals. Each ChatGPT query is estimated to need ten times more energy to complete than the typical Google search online, and AI computing is estimated to globally use more energy than all of India, by 2030.¹⁷ Employers and public bodies must also be required to explicitly assess environmental impacts of any current or proposed use of AI. GMB should also promote enforceable standards for environmentally responsible AI if we are to achieve the 'world of freedom, beauty and equality' that our founder Will Thorne envisaged.

2.28 The US-UK Tech Prosperity Deal still under negotiation seeks to build AI data centres in Greater London and the Northeast England, the latter supposedly "unlocking more than 5,000 jobs" with further jobs envisaged in new nuclear power stations proposed to power them.¹⁸

2.29 Growth of decent jobs from AI in an environmentally sustainable way should be supported, but this will not happen without a greater dependable baseload of low-carbon energy supply that only nuclear can provide, and not while government still plans to electrify home heating which would already overload our ageing transmission network and exacerbate skyrocketing energy prices. Government energy and infrastructure policy must root itself in a balanced UK energy mix of domestic sources of renewables, low-carbon, oil and gas, and work with energy unions like GMB and our supported organisations like Climate Jobs UK to deliver AI infrastructure equitably.



Microsoft's Fairwater centre, Wisconsin. Currently the world's largest AI-focused data centre¹⁹

Collective bargaining on AI at work

- 2.30 GMB Congress policy since 2022 remains that workers should have a statutory right to consultation when employers wish to transfer their tasks to automatic processes like AI. However, the rapid rise of AI tools and the Government's aim to make the UK "one of the AI Superpowers" show that GMB's industrial and policy approach to AI must be more proactive. We should not be intimidated by AI but instead treat it as another issue to recruit and organise on.
- 2.31 Reps will need to closely monitor the introduction of AI tools in their workplaces. Where AI is being used unethically, or imposed from above by management, and there is collective will from GMB members to campaign against it, we should not be afraid to stand up and take action to oppose it. We will have the strength to do so if we follow our GMB@Work principle that each workplace should be organised as if a ballot for action was due.
- 2.32 We will work to develop and signpost resources to empower GMB Reps to challenge employers about new technology in their workplace and ensure its subject to proper scrutiny.
- 2.33 In union recognised workplaces, TULCRA 1992 legislation places a general duty on employers to disclose information requested by union reps for the purposes of all stages of collective bargaining. The potential impact of AI technology adoption in areas like worker pay, conditions, equipment and staffing, productivity and operations and financial performance of the company all warrant information about it being a legitimate request under TULCRA.
- 2.34 Ensuring workers are involved in any process of new technology design in the workplace should be rooted in general principles of ensuring workers are a) informed of the problem the technology is meant to fix, b) are asked to identify potential issues with the technology and c) have feedback included and incorporated into technology design, especially input from workers with protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010.
- 2.35 Further guidance on requesting information from employers regarding new technology at work and negotiating principles are contained in Appendix 2 of this report.

2.36 Going forward, GMB will learn from examples of good practice in our union and elsewhere to develop our own model agreement on introduction of new workplace technology and algorithmic management, building on previous GMB model agreements on workplace surveillance.²⁰

2.37 International examples of trade union collective agreements on AI and automation:

Italy: the CGIL union negotiated with call centre company Konecta that “under no circumstances will the personal data of employees be used to train the AI models used to ensure the functioning of Agent Assist [call monitoring technology]”.²¹

Ireland: the Financial Services Union negotiated with the Bank of Ireland commitments to provide necessary staff training to adapt to new technologies during working hours and to not be subject to decisions that affect them legally or significantly based solely on automated variables”, with respect for the ‘human-in-control’ principle.²²

United States: the SEIU negotiated an agreement with the Pennsylvania State Government that AI systems “will be utilized as a tool to assist public employees in supporting the public”.²³ The CWA’s agreement with the Associated Press stipulates that AI shall not be used to layoff employees or remove job roles, and can only be used with direct involvement and oversight of employees.²⁴

GMB’s ‘Jobs First’ Demands of Government and Policymakers on AI

2.38 There are currently no laws or legal frameworks in the UK that specifically address AI risks relevant to workers.

2.39 GMB contributed to the TUC’s drafting of an Artificial Intelligence (Regulation and Employment Rights) Bill in 2024²⁵, however the government has not supported it and has since downplayed the need for regulation. GMB will need to be part of the fight for proper regulation of AI so that it works for working people.

2.40 It is already GMB policy since Congress 2022 that workers must have a statutory right to consultation when employers wish to transfer tasks from workers to automatic processes, and a right to transparency. However, Labour’s 2024 Manifesto only committed to ensuring employers consult and negotiate with workers over proposals to introduce surveillance technologies.

2.41 This report commits GMB to a 'Jobs First' campaigning approach to new technologies at work, ensuring they improve work rather than destroy jobs. **We call for stronger legal protections that:**

- In the private sector, ensure that where new technology risks replacing jobs, employers are mandated to secure union agreement and guarantee job protection for workers affected through redeployment and paid retraining.
- In the public sector, implement stricter and specific regulation where AI is being used guaranteeing AI will only be used to support public service delivery, not replace staff or make decisions that affect the public without human oversight.
- Establish clear liability frameworks for Automated Vehicle-related incidents, protecting victims and ensuring accountability. Legislation must also create a "Just Transition Fund," financed by a levy on Automated Vehicle operators dedicated to funding comprehensive retraining programs and robust social security for displaced transport workers.
- Give greater protection to workers over use of their data and from AI bias against those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.
- Strengthen existing legislation and frameworks to give workers and the public more rights and control over when and how their data can be processed by AI technology.

3. Skills and rebuilding an industrial economy

- 3.1 As set out in this report, new employment rights only benefit the working-class when we have jobs and strong unions to enforce them. An unjust transition to an AI-powered economy that is not based on 'jobs first' principles will lead to less decent, unionised jobs by deskilling many workers in sectors of the economy – exacerbated by a demographic 'time bomb' in some industries such as the risk of mass retirements of Engineers in the next decade²⁶
- 3.2 GMB maintains that the development of a highly skilled workforce is the decisive factor in securing our nation's future prosperity and do so equitably. To do this we need an industrial strategy that allows meaningful direction from trade unions to prioritise a highly skilled human workforce and the retention and redistribution of it in the economy where big challenges like new technology and climate change affect it.
- 3.3 The UK Government's Modern Industrial Strategy launched in November 2025 pledges to create a permanent independent Industrial Strategy Council and reform "the skills and employment support system" to support 8 key sectors which include sectors where GMB organises heavily such as Advanced Manufacturing, Clean Energy and Defence. But it risks remaking past mistakes if the skills development system is not reformed to support it.
- 3.4 Skills policy in the UK is devolved, and England's technical education system is particularly fragmented, with many qualifications that can be similar in content and weak employer engagement.²⁷ The Labour government inherited a 'lost decade' of adult learning from the Tories. From 2016 to 2022, over quarter of a million less adults from the most deprived areas of Britain were undertaking education or skills training. The number of people aged 25 and above undertaking this kind of learning halved to 1.2 million between 2010 and 2021.²⁸
- 3.5 Adult education was slashed by 40% since 2010 and fees were introduced for gaining the most basic qualifications. Employers' training investment has also fallen in every sector since the Tories' flawed apprenticeship levy was introduced in 2017. The biggest falls in investment per employee have been in public administration (-64%), hotels and restaurants (-38%), and health and social care (-32%).²⁹
- 3.6 Labour set up Skills England in 2024 to move towards "a more strategic approach

of harnessing artificial intelligence and data, alongside employer and stakeholder intelligence, to ensure apprenticeships and qualifications are responsive to changes in the economy and reflect industry needs.” However, Skills England is not a statutory body but an agency within the Department for Education where decisions are made ultimately by senior civil servants in London away from these major shifts in the economy that workers are hit first and worst by.³⁰

- 3.7 A more sectoral and devolved approach backed up by proper public funding is needed. It is estimated that over a quarter of all vacancies in the UK are because of skill-shortages.³¹ Lack of sectoral skills policy and infrastructure like training centres ensure that most firms do not sufficiently invest in skills formation. The ‘free market’ also cannot enable student demand to be aligned with economic demand. Without economic planning done jointly with unions and employers that reflect characteristics of local areas, centralised policymaking in Whitehall will not unlock the skilled jobs needed to meet the aims of Labour’s industrial strategy.
- 3.8 Such necessary changes will need work and planning, across governmental departments together with the establishment of specialised institutes for shipbuilding, energy capture, design, development, and aeronautics. Modern apprenticeships will also need to be ‘re-industrialised’, with more time spent on the shop floor and placed within a nationally recognised framework, with a clear path charted to careers within industry.
- 3.9 It is also vital that qualifications and standards are transferable and readily appreciable by employers so that young workers are not tied to a single site or firm as their bespoke qualifications are meaningless outside of one employer. Alongside this, a UCAS style clearing house for UK-wide apprenticeships with a single point of application and entry would help address this – as set out in the Congress 2025 Statement on Industrial Strategy.³²

The growing international consensus for revitalising technical education

- 3.10 It is increasingly consensus between governments internationally that skills and vocational training must be better aligned with the demand for skilled jobs in the labour market. The below international examples show how better skills outcomes can be made by increasing state direction of policy and economic planning coupled but also increase the role of both unions and employers in the system to align apprenticeships and vocational training to the skills that are actually in demand.

- 3.11 In the United States, the former Biden administration's Inflation Reduction Act and other policies allowed trade unions to help create a series of technical and job-related training centres, funded by contributions from employers and focused upon workers covered by collective bargaining agreements. In terms of staff and scope, these were impressive initiatives that gave members of unions collective control over the supply of skilled labour, as well as a say in developing curriculum and the honing of expertise, backed up by a national plan. As an explicit part of this plan was the encouragement of members of previously excluded communities into high skill, high wage, full-time jobs.
- 3.12 In other countries like Germany, Denmark and Sweden trade unions shape vocational training policy on a local and national level as part of Tripartite (union-employer-state) bodies informed by labour market analysis.
- 3.13 Over half of high school students in Germany who decide against university apply for vocational training. Student allowances and two-thirds of initial training costs are funded by companies. This reduces burdens on public spending but is also an investment on reducing future recruitment costs as companies and the state jointly shape the skills supply to respond to economic demand for certain occupations.³³ This state-regulated 'dual-system' has parallel on-the-job training and vocational school study for 2-4 years in over 300 recognised training occupations, with 96.5 per cent of training time took place directly in the workplace.³⁴ Occupations in demand for vocational training in Germany include Nursing, Dentistry, Robotics Engineers and Factory Maintenance Technicians.
- 3.14 Finland provides a helpful example of addressing labour market impact of technological change and Net-Zero policies with its 'micro-qualifications' system. These are short, targeted learning programmes to prepare individuals for specific jobs and help workers reskill quickly into new roles created by the 'green transition' or update their knowledge in response to regulatory or technological changes, such as AI.³⁵ This system could be a helpful way for workers to build on their existing qualifications and retrain if it can be integrated into the UK's wider training and education system and backed up by financial support from state and industry.

Policymakers must learn from industrial good practice already in the UK

- 3.15 A new strategic role under Skills England could do well by learning from good practice that is already taking place on our own shores from industry and unions

working together.

- 3.16 Team Barrow is a public-private partnership that brings together the skills funding and capabilities of national and local government with Cumbria University and defence manufacturing employers local to the town such as BAE Systems, where GMB members work. The plan specifically addresses the mismatch in skills versus demand by ensuring higher education and skills providers work proactively with local employers to identify skills gaps and develop training programs to ensure supply meets demand for not just local employers but for the social aims such as building new homes in the area.³⁶
- 3.17 The construction of the new HPC nuclear power station demonstrates that large infrastructure projects can deliver apprenticeships at scale and quality when union involvement is built-in from the outset. Following trade union negotiation with GMB and Unite, the employer EDF pledged to create 1,000 apprenticeships during construction, but hit this target ahead of schedule in 2022 and has since expanded delivery to around 1,500 apprentices by 2025, of which the majority are recruited from the south west.
- 3.18 HPC's apprenticeship policy is integrated within a site-wide industrial relations framework agreement which covers all contractors and subcontractors on site, ensuring more consistent pay, conditions and skills standards across the multi-tier supply chain. Unions have played a central role in ensuring apprentices step onto skilled grades upon completion, ensuring apprenticeships are trade- specific, accredited and portable as well as in health, safety and welfare.

GMB's 'Jobs First' demands of Government and Policymakers on industrial skills:

- A statutory right to paid time off for all workers to attend learning or training where jobs are at risk from technological change or meeting Net-Zero commitments, backed by a Skills Fund to finance it with state and employer contributions.
- Sectoral Job Plans with Tripartite (union, employer and state) direction that identifies current and future skills needs and ensures accessible routes into new jobs.
- Procurement reform that ensures employers in receipt of public money guarantee job retention or redeployment opportunities before cutting jobs.

- A UCAS-style clearing house for UK- wide apprenticeships, together with a single point of application and entry.
- The 'reindustrialisation' of apprenticeships by:
 - increasing curriculum time spent on practical learning in a workplace
 - Increased government and employer funding.
 - A stronger tripartite role between unions, employers and training providers to align apprenticeship curriculums to the economy to reduce the gap between skills taught and skills required in the workplace.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The workplace is where GMB is best able to protect members and improve their working conditions, but we must have a clear and credible industrial strategy that advances our members' interests in all workplaces and sectors they work in this changing economy. This Special Report and its commitments seek to guide our efforts to build this and assure our members that their union will support them to take on the challenges ahead in their world of work.
- 4.2 New workers' rights will help unions start to redistribute wealth and power in our economy back towards labour through reinstated rights and trade union freedoms.
- 4.3 However, we risk a swing back even further towards capital if unions do not fight for a greater role in setting the direction of our economy, and the equitable treatment of those who make the wealth in it. If the skills we need, or new technology like Artificial Intelligence, are left solely for employers and government to decide at whim, without protections for workers' jobs, livelihoods and the environment around us, then Capital can still be given the upper hand.
- 4.4 As GMB's Rulebook states: we seek *"to make work, and general conditions governing life, better for our members through organising and campaigning in the workplace"* and *"rebalance the economic forces in our society in order to ensure equity."* We will keep standing up for our members' interests against those of 'Capital': unscrupulous employers and others who exploit workers.

Appendix 1 –

Employment Act 2025 Reforms – estimated dates effective from	
Industrial action	
In the public sector, industrial action ballots now only require a majority ‘yes’ vote from members to go ahead, no additional requirement for at least 40 per cent turnout. Unions also no longer required to pay employer ‘check-off’ costs.	In effect
Industrial action ballot mandates increased to 12 months.	In effect
Notice period for unions to give employers before industrial action reduced to 10 days	In effect
Employees protected from being unfairly dismissed by employers for going on strike, and unions are no longer required to appoint a Picket Supervisor.	In effect
Industrial action ballots will no longer require a 50 per cent turnout threshold to go ahead, subject to e-balloting reforms being introduced.	Exp. 2026
Collective Redundancy	
Better redundancy protections: If 20+ members are made redundant in a 90-day period and the employer fails to consult and inform GMB, then any Employment Tribunal claim for a Protective Award can be up to 180 days’ pay for each employee. Previously up to 90 days.	In effect
Union Access and Recognition	
Simplified process where unions are no longer required to show their members amount to at least 10 per cent of the proposed bargaining unit when seeking statutory recognition –will be lowered to a % below 10% but above 1%. To be confirmed.	Exp. 2026
Right of trade union access to workplaces to recruit and organise workers in hostile employers	Exp. 2026
Individual worker rights	
Day one statutory sick pay (SSP), benefitting up to 1.3 million low paid workers. All employees entitled to SSP at 80% of their weekly wage or a flat rate (currently £123.25 pw), whichever lower.	In effect
Reduction of the qualifying period for claiming unfair dismissal reduces to 6 months continuous service with same employer. Previously two years.	Exp. 2027
Day one Paternity Leave and Parental Leave rights; with 52 weeks of paternity leave granted for bereaved fathers and partners if the birthing parent or primary adopter dies within the first year of a child’s life.	In effect
Banning “exploitative” Zero-Hour Contracts – with the right for workers to be offered a guaranteed hours contract after a certain period.	Exp. 2027
Greater protections for workers who report sexual harassment in the workplace: If member is dismissed by their employer because of the protected disclosure, dismissal is considered automatically unfair. Compensation is uncapped and Non-Disclosure Agreements unenforceable.	In effect
Extension of Employment Tribunal claim time limits to 6 months. Previously 3 months.	Exp. 2026
Enforcement of workers’ rights	
The Fair Work Agency brings together the HMRC’s Minimum Wage team, Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) and Employment Agency Inspectorate, with greater enforcement powers and cooperation with unions	In effect
1. Restrictions on employer use of ‘Fire and Rehire’, 2. increased blacklisting regulations, 3. Regulation of umbrella companies	1: Exp. 2026 2/3: Exp. 2027
Duty on employers to inform workers of their right to join a trade union	Exp. 2026
Equality at work	
GMB reps can ask employers what plans they have to produce and publish a Gender Equality Action Plan and support for members experiencing the menopause before it becomes mandatory in 2027. Government advised employers to consult with unions.	In effect
Reinstate a strengthened Two-Tier Workforce Code to ensure workers on outsourced contracts are treated no less favourably than counterparts directly employed by the public authority	Exp. 2026

Appendix 2 – Negotiating introduction of AI and other tech at work

Finding examples of good practice:

The University of Berkely’s Labor Centre holds an inventory of trade union collective bargaining agreements which addresses new technology like AI, as well as other resources on technology at work at: <https://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/technology-and-work/>

The Labour Research Department, which GMB is affiliated with, produces a detailed guide to AI at work for union reps, which can be purchased by GMB Branches and Regions online.³⁷

Key issues when negotiating agreements on new technology at work

- Think carefully about definitions – what and who will be covered?
- Establish general principles and draw clear red lines
- Create the ‘apparatus’ needed- the institutions and roles to be responsible for AI use
- Consider other accountability systems
- Ensure workers share in the rewards from greater use of technology
- Protect human capabilities to review, contact and seek expertise
- Secure full transparency
- Introduce data power and control for workers

Consider requesting a workplace AI Risk Assessment:

Reps can ask the employer to carry out a risk assessment of deploying any new technology that they are considering in the workplace. One helpful template for this is the TUC’s ‘Workplace AI Risk Assessment’ which states employers’ assessments should contain the below:³⁸

- | | |
|--|--|
| a. A description of the proposed artificial intelligence system, | including how that metric will be defined, when high-risk decision-making takes place, |
| b. A description of the relevant value chain, | j. A description of how it is proposed to monitor the |
| c. The date from which it is proposed that the system will be used in high-risk decision-making, | artificial intelligence system for the risks to the |
| d. The categories of high-risk decision which it is proposed the system will take or contribute to, | rights of workers, employees or jobseekers |
| e. The proposed purpose or aim in using the system, | contained in the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the Human Rights Act 1998, the Equality Act 2010, the Data Protection Act 2018, and the UK |
| f. The logic which will underpin the proposed decision-making, | General Data Protection Regulation, |
| g. The proposed data that will be processed by the system in relation to high-risk decision-making, | k. An assessment of the risks to the rights of workers, employees or jobseekers contained in the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, the Human Rights Act 1998, the Equality Act 2010, the Data Protection Act 2018, and the UK General Data Protection Regulation |
| h. The way in which the personal data of employees, workers or jobseekers will influence the proposed decisions, | l. The measures to be taken with a view to eliminating the risks |
| i. description of how it is proposed to monitor the artificial intelligence system for accuracy, | |

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