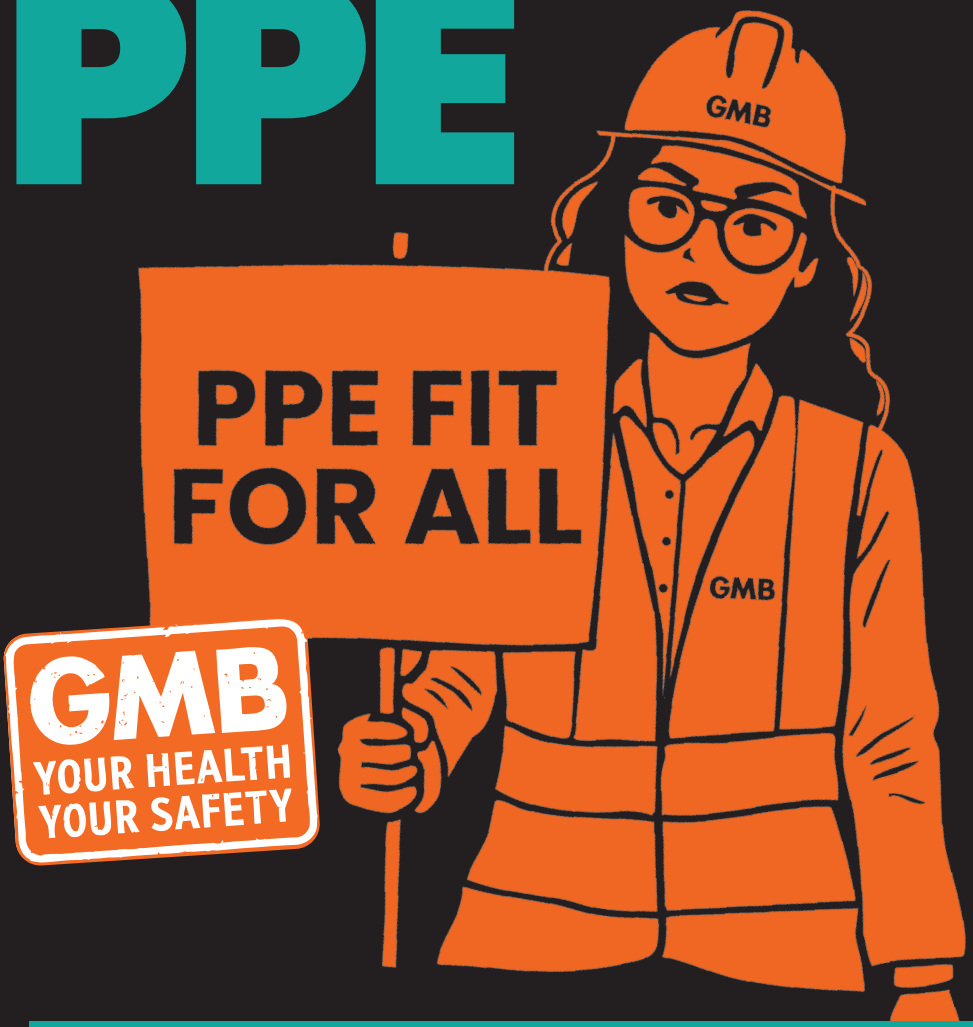
INCLUSIVE PPE



Negotiation Guide for Reps & Officers

GMB UNION

gmb.org.uk

Workers are safer in the union

JOIN GMB

GMB UNION

MAKE WORK BETTER

THE FACTS



Many workers are currently expected to perform hazardous jobs using PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) that does not fit their bodies or working conditions.

This is not a minor issue. **It is a systemic safety problem** affecting women, disabled workers, ethnic minority workers, and anyone whose body shape falls outside traditional PPE design.

A lack of correctly fitting PPE prevents workers doing their jobs, exposes people to unnecessary risk and leaves employers open to liability. Change is overdue and is in everyone's interests.

Employers already have a legal duty to provide PPE that is suitable and sufficient.* When PPE does not fit the worker, it cannot be considered either.

*Regulation 4, PPE at Work Regulations 1992. Section 2, Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

THE MESSAGE

PPE that doesn't fit is unsafe PPE.

This campaign is not about uniform design, it is about safety equipment designed to protect the worker as the last line of defence.

Inclusive PPE is about:

- ☑ safety
- ☑ equality
- ☑ dignity at work



Workers cannot adapt their bodies to equipment that was never designed for them. And if they adapt equipment to fit their bodies, workers put themselves at risk of both injury and personal liability.

Members should not carry out work without correctly fitting PPE, and have a right to refuse to undertake the task if deemed unsafe.

THE EVIDENCE

GMB's survey results showed widespread issues across industries.

Our members reported that:

- Two thirds have experienced PPE that affected their ability to work safely.
- Common problems reported, across all industries include:
  - Lack of availability and long lead in times
  - PPE restricting movement and dexterity
  - Workers feeing undervalued, uncomfortable and unsafe
- 78% believe better-fitting PPE would improve their performance and safety

The survey also found:

- Over half of workers raised PPE issues, yet only one in four saw action taken
- Half had purchased their own PPE, yet only one in ten were reimbursed
- Four in ten employers reported supply problems

This demonstrates that the current system is failing and needs to change.

YOUR POWER AS A REP

Reps should ground negotiations in their employers' legal duties.

Under existing law, employers must provide PPE that is suitable, adequate and effective for the task.

This said, current legislation does not clearly define what "suitable" means and enforcement is weak, so we cannot rely on the law to immediately protect our workforce. We need to use the avenues we have available to us to expose the problem and force employers to act. Reps have access to:

- *Health & Safety committees/forums*
- *Health & Safety documentation*
- *Accident/PPE Issue Report Log*
- *Procurement processes*
- *Staff equality forums*
- *And more...*



BUILDING YOUR STRENGTH – THE ORGANISING APPROACH

Your members are where your power lies, and they are the ones who hold the evidence.

You can use any or all of the following methods to build your case:

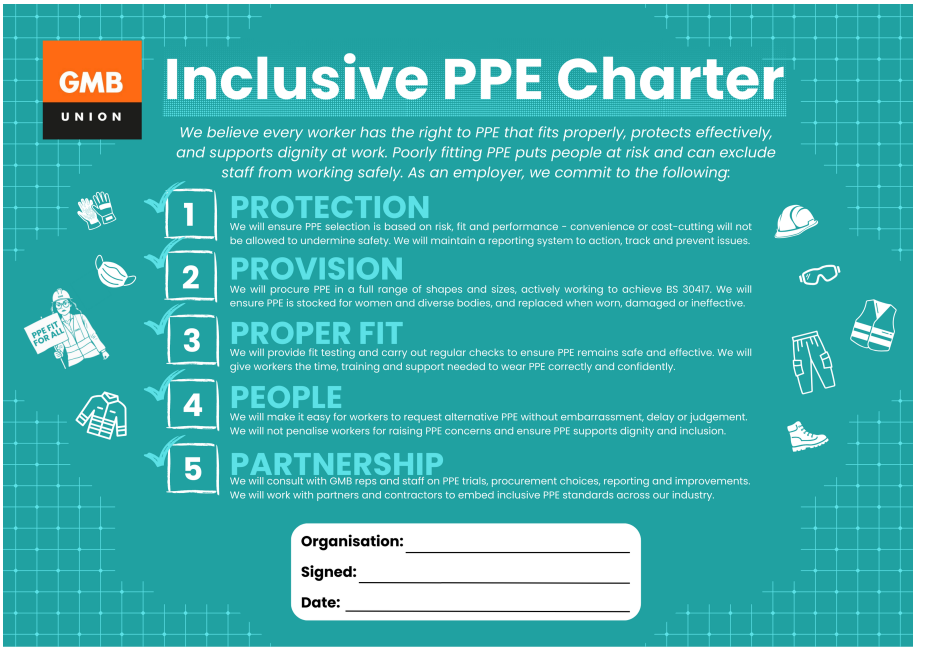
1. PPE Specific Health & Safety Inspection
   Use the survey/inspection checklist in this booklet to collect evidence
2. Hold a members meeting
   Online or in person is fine, as long as your members can talk to you
3. Promote the campaign in your workplace
   Materials available at:
   www.gmb.org.uk/ppe-fit-for-all

Your members stories are what bring this issue to life. They can change the employers view things, help other workers identify common issues, and assist with gaining public support.



GMB'S INCLUSIVE PPE CHARTER

GMB has developed our 'Inclusive PPE Charter' which we are encouraging employers to sign up to show their commitment to providing that is PPE fit-for-form.



You can approach your employer and ask them to sign up to the Charter.

Use the evidence you have collected and the points throughout this booklet to build your argument.

THE INCLUSIVE PPE STANDARD

GMB's campaign supports BS 30417 - Provision of Inclusive PPE, the first British standard dedicated to inclusive PPE.

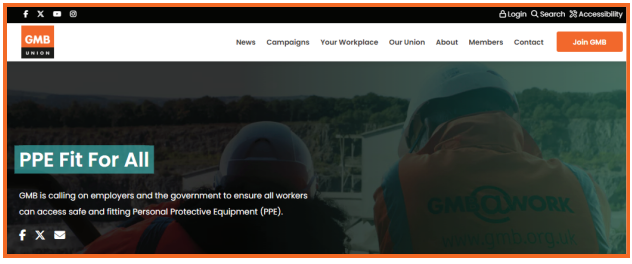
This standard provides guidance on:

- selecting PPE for diverse workers
- procurement practices
- worker consultation
- fit and accessibility

Reps should encourage employers to treat this standard as the benchmark for good practice.

You can find the standard on the webpage and can use it to help guide your negotiations.

www.gmb.org.uk/ppe-fit-for-all



WHY EMPLOYERS SHOULD ACT NOW

Safety Risk

Poor PPE fit increases:

- accidents
- equipment failure
- exposure to hazards

In high-risk sectors this can be life-threatening.

Legal risk

Employers relying on PPE that doesn't fit workers' risk:

- breach of duty under safety law
- discrimination claims
- liability following accidents

Inclusive PPE reduces legal exposure.

Workforce participation and productivity

Ill-fitting PPE can exclude workers and prevent them undertaking tasks effectively:

- women in manual industries
- pregnant or disabled workers
- Anyone where fit restricts movement or dexterity

Inclusive PPE improves recruitment and retention.

PROCUREMENT PRESSURE: PUBLIC VS PRIVATE SECTOR

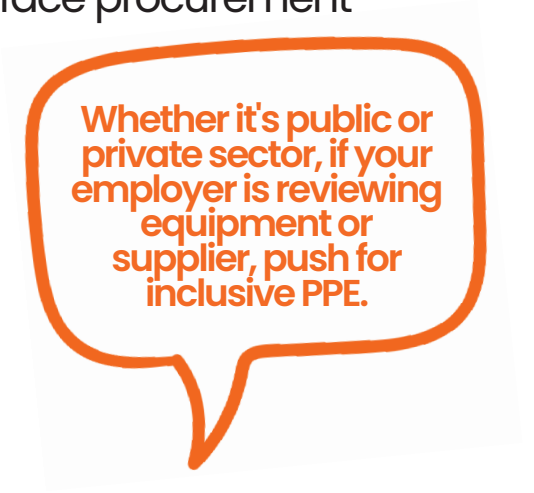
Reps should understand that different pressure points apply depending on the employer.

Public sector and government contractors

Public sector employers and companies working on government contracts face procurement obligations.

Government contracts increasingly require suppliers to demonstrate:

- equality compliance
- safety standards
- ethical procurement



The campaign is pushing for BS 30417 compliance to become a requirement in public procurement frameworks, an issue already on the parliamentary agenda. This means employers bidding for public contracts will need to show they provide inclusive PPE.

Adopting inclusive PPE now protects future contract eligibility.





Private sector employers



Private employers may be more responsive to:

- safety liability
- productivity
- workforce retention
- reputation

Reps can emphasise that inclusive PPE is becoming the expected standard across industries.

Companies that fail to adapt risk falling behind.



COMMON EMPLOYER ARGUMENTS AND REP RESPONSES

“We’ve never had complaints.”

Many workers stay silent because they feel embarrassed or fear being seen as difficult.

Once workers are asked directly, issues often emerge quickly.

“Inclusive PPE costs too much.”

Accidents, injuries, and staff turnover cost far more.

Correct PPE reduces risk and improves productivity.

“Suppliers don’t offer those options.”

The PPE market is changing rapidly, and many suppliers now offer inclusive ranges.

Employers should demand equipment that meets safety needs rather than limiting workers to what is convenient.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

Reps should aim for clear, measurable outcomes, such as:

- employer signs the Inclusive PPE Charter
- workplace PPE audit
- expanded PPE size ranges
- worker trials of new PPE
- union involvement in procurement
- regular PPE review meetings

All of these are wins, and a combination of a few can really shift your workplace culture. **Make sure you tell your members when you have a win so they know you've all been part of making the change.**

Inclusive PPE is not a minor issue, it is a structural safety problem.

It is a basic requirement for safe and fair workplaces.

PPE fit-for-form is PPE fit-for-all, anything less risks our safety.

RESOURCES

THE CHARTER – A NEGOTIATION TOOL

GMB UNION

Inclusive PPE Charter

We believe every worker has the right to PPE that fits properly, Protects effectively, and supports dignity at work. Poorly fitting PPE Puts people at risk and can exclude staff from working safely.

1 PROTECTION
We will ensure PPE selection is based on fit, risk and performance – convenience or cost-cutting will not be allowed to undermine safety. We maintain a reporting system to action, track and prevent issues.

2 PROVISION
We will procure PPE in a full range of shapes and sizes, actively working to achieve BS 30417. We will ensure PPE is stocked for women and diverse bodies and replaced when worn, damaged or ineffective.

3 PROPER FIT
We will provide fit testing and carry out regular checks to ensure PPE remains safe and effective. We will give workers the time, training and support needed to wear PPE correctly and confidently.

4 PEOPLE
We will make it easy for workers to request alternative PPE without embarrassment, delay or judgement. We will not penalise workers raising PPE concerns and ensure PPE supports dignity and inclusion.

5 PARTNERSHIP
We will consult with GMB reps and staff on PPE trials, procurement choices, reporting and improvements. We will work with partners and contractors to embed inclusive PPE standards across our industry.



Use the charter to structure workplace discussions.

PROTECTION

Argument: Safety equipment must be selected based on risk and performance, not convenience or cost.

Questions:

- How is PPE selected for each role?
- Are workers involved in testing equipment?
- How are PPE failures recorded?

Actions:

- PPE risk assessment review
- reporting system for PPE issues
- union involvement in safety decisions



PROVISION

Argument: If PPE does not exist in sizes or designs suitable for all workers, provision is inadequate.

Questions:

- What size range is stocked?
- Are alternative designs available?
- What happens if PPE does not fit a worker?

Actions:

- expanded size ranges
- inclusive suppliers
- rapid replacement systems



PROPER FIT

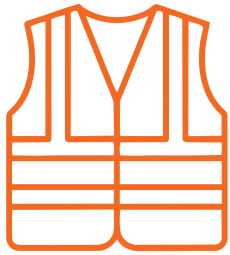
Argument: PPE only works when it fits the individual user, e.g. respirators that fail face-fit tests provide no protection at all.

Questions:

- Are fit tests carried out where required?
- Do workers have time to trial PPE?
- Can workers have tailored garments if
- necessary?

Actions:

- fit testing
- worker trials
- training on correct PPE use





PEOPLE

Argument: Workers must feel able to raise PPE concerns without embarrassment or fear. Many issues go unreported because workers feel uncomfortable raising them.

Questions:

- What reporting systems are in place for inadequate PPE?
- What is the escalation process for workers who cannot access correctly fitting PPE?
- How are workers trained on their safety rights and responsibilities?

Actions:

- clear reporting process
- no penalties for refusing unsafe PPE
- support for workers requesting alternatives



PARTNERSHIP

Argument: Workers are the experts in how PPE performs in real working conditions.

Questions:

- What steps are being taken to procure and stock inclusive PPE?
- How can you influence our contractors to adopt inclusive standards?
- How will reps be involved in PPE decisions and monitoring?

Actions:

- joint PPE review groups
- worker trials before procurement
- union consultation on PPE decisions



WORKPLACE SURVEY

Have you had issues with PPE not fitting properly?
Yes/No

What specific problems have you had?
OPEN TEXT

Have you raised PPE issues with your employer?
Yes, resolved/Yes, unresolved/No

What items do you have problems accessing?
OPEN TEXT

Have you had to buy your own PPE?
Yes, reimbursed/Yes, not reimbursed/No

Have you had to adapt your PPE to make it fit/safe?
Yes/No

Do you think better fitting PPE improve your performance and safety at work?
Yes/No

Name:
Role:
Mobile/email:
GMB member? Yes/No
GMB rep? Yes/No/Interested

TEMPLATE PPE ISSUE REPORT LOG

Remember, if an accident occurs it should be logged in the accident book too.

Date/Time	
Job Role	
Location/task	
PPE type	
Type of issue (tick all that apply)	Injury Near miss Fit issue Usability Availability Gender-specific Disability/Neurodivergence related Religious/cultural Comfort Other:
Impact (tick all that apply)	Safety concern Discomfort Fatigue/emotional distress Minor injury Missed or slowed task Had to modify/remove PPE Other:
Details	
Reported to/when Action taken	
System change required?	Procurement/alternative supplier Policy Training Other:

INCLUSIVE PPE INSPECTION CHECKLIST

PPE Safety & Inclusivity Checklist for GMB Safety Representatives

GENERAL COMPLIANCE	No Action Required	Action Required	Urgent Action Required	Notes
PPE meets relevant safety standards (e.g., CE marking, UKCA).				
Documentation and certification available and up to date.				
Suitable for the specific hazards identified in the workplace.				
Proper storage and maintenance procedures are in place.				

PPE Safety & Inclusivity Checklist for GMB Safety Reps

FIT AND SIZING	No Action Required	Action Required	Urgent Action Required	Notes
Clothing available in a full range of sizes and cuts to fit all workers				
Adjustable features provided to ensure proper fit.				
Shoes / boots are specifically made for male and female foot shapes (not unisex fit) Items such as gloves, goggles, masks and hearing protection are not 'one size fits all'				
Harnesses, stab /bullet proof vests, RPE, and other specialist PPE is made to fit the body shapes of all workers required to wear them (not unisex fit)				
Fit testing is conducted where required.				
PPE does not compromise comfort or mobility.				
Maternity-safe PPE is available where needed.				
PPE accommodates religious dress (e.g., turbans, hijabs).				
Alternative designs available where standard PPE conflicts with beliefs.				
PPE suitable for workers with disabilities where required.				
Adjustments made or alternative PPE supplied to be worn with hearing aids, glasses, prosthetics, etc.				

PPE Safety & Inclusivity Checklist for GMB Safety Representatives

COMFORT & USABILITY	No Action Required	Action Required	Urgent Action Required	Notes
PPE is comfortable for extended wear. Does not cause excessive heat, pressure, or irritation.				
It is easy to put on, remove, and adjust.				
It is compatible with other PPE when worn together.				
PPE doesn't create unnecessary barriers to performing duties.				

PPE Safety & Inclusivity Checklist for GMB Safety Representatives

WORKER CONSULTATION & FEEDBACK	No Action Required	Action Required	Urgent Action Required	Notes
Workers consulted during PPE selection process.				
Trials of new equipment carried out by a wide range of workers.				
Feedback system in place for reporting issues.				
Concerns are acted on promptly.				

PPE Safety & Inclusivity Checklist for GMB Safety Representatives

TRAINING & AWARENESS	No Action Required	Action Required	Urgent Action Required	Notes
All workers are trained in the correct use of PPE.				
Information is provided in accessible formats.				
Training considers language and literacy needs.				

PPE Safety & Inclusivity Checklist for GMB Safety Representatives

MAINTENANCE & REPLACEMENT	No Action Required	Action Required	Urgent Action Required	Notes
Regular inspection and maintenance carried out.				
Damaged or worn PPE replaced promptly.				
Clear and simple reporting process for faults.				

PPE CHARTER EMPLOYER LETTER

Dear [Name],

Inclusive PPE is no longer a niche issue, it is now a recognised, cross sector health and safety priority.

GMB's PPE Fit for All campaign has recently been covered across national and specialist media, including The Mirror, British Safety Council, the Labour Research Department, various trade publications, and more.

Awareness has grown, with the issue now firmly on the parliamentary agenda.

A number of leading organisations have now signed GMB's PPE Fit for All Charter, reflecting growing recognition across policy, professional, and industry audiences that current PPE standards are failing significant parts of the workforce.

This is not an individualised issue. Fit-to-form PPE is about workplace safety, equality and compliance.

Our members are being put at risk due to PPE that does not fit properly, particularly women and other marginalised groups whose needs have historically been overlooked in design and procurement.

There is a clear operational risk too; ill-fitting PPE can impact on productivity, risk management and recruitment and retention of diverse workers.

With increasing evidence that standard PPE specifications often fail to account for the diversity of those required to use it, there is a clear foreseeable risk to workers safety. This may expose employers and public bodies to legal and compliance risk under the Equality Act 2010, including potential indirect discrimination. It also raises serious questions about whether current procurement approaches are meeting expected professional standards and public sector equality duties.

We are at a point where organisations must take action or risk falling behind expectations from workers, regulators, and government.

We are asking you to sign GMB's Inclusive PPE Charter.

By signing, your organisation will commit to:

- Providing PPE that is suitable for all workers
- Reviewing procurement processes to ensure inclusive sizing and design
- Engaging with workers and unions to address existing gaps and drive continuous improvements to PPE standards

We would welcome your organisation's commitment and would be pleased to support next steps following signup. This is an opportunity to demonstrate leadership and ensure your safety systems are sufficient for a modern workforce.

Please confirm if you are willing to sign up or if you would like to discuss further. I look forward to your response.

Regards,

[Your Name, Your Role]
GMB Union

For more information about the campaign, please visit: www.gmb.org.uk/ppe-fit-for-all

JOIN GMB

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