

UNISON Equality survey 2019

Report of results

Introduction

UNISON's equality survey has been carried out annually since 2016. It surveys the views of UNISON members on a number of questions, including: their involvement in UNISON; their employer's attitude towards equality issues; their own experiences of discrimination in the workplace; and their standard of living. This report is divided into sections reflecting these topics.

Every year a specific question is chosen which reflects a campaign aim of one of the equality groups. This year the additional question concerned time off for caring responsibilities and whether employers had granted requests for this.

The full questions to the survey are included as an appendix. The raw data has also been segmented by Region and Service Group and those results circulated.

Participation in UNISON

25% of respondents hold lay positions in UNISON, at branch, regional or national level [\[Question 7\]](#). This over-representation of activists in the responses is to be expected – where relevant, some responses have been broken down to reflect the answers from non-activist respondents.

24% of respondents to the survey say they are **more likely** to get involved with UNISON than at this time last year [\[Question 9\]](#), with only 9% saying they are **less likely** and the remainder saying there is **no change**.

So what stands in the way of members wanting get involved in UNISON? 75% of respondents to the survey don't hold official lay positions in UNISON, so the responses to this question were filtered to reflect only those who aren't currently active.

When asked what the barriers are to getting more involved [\[Question 8\]](#), the top one is **pressure of work**, expressed by 27.5% of respondents. Although some members are simply **not interested in getting more involved** (24.9%), and some cite **family responsibilities eg. dependent care needs** (19.6%), some of the reasons given by members against getting more involved and active could be addressed by branches and regions through organisational and educational initiatives, including **lack of confidence** (13.4%); **don't know what is required** (17.0%) and **looks like too big a commitment** (16.5%). The **time of meetings** is a barrier to 11.2% of members and the **location** is a barrier to 9.1% (with a further 0.8% saying that **meetings are inaccessible to me as a disabled person**).

It is encouraging that only 2.1% say that their reason for not becoming more active is that their **branch is not welcoming or encouraging**.

Of those who responded, 40% had taken part in UNISON activities of any kind in the last year [\[Question 10\]](#) while 60% had not. In the case of members who do not describe themselves as activists, 23% of respondents still say they have **attended at least one UNISON event or activity** over the last year. The results are similar for the question [\[Question 11\]](#) on whether respondents had attended events organised by UNISON’s **self-organised groups or young members** – 26% of total respondents had attended these and 16% of non-activist respondents.

When asked what other activities they had attended (apart from those arranged by self-organised groups/young members), the most frequent was a **branch meeting (including AGM)** (65.8%), **workplace meeting** (58.6%), **branch-organised training** (28.1%) and **National Delegate Conference** (19.0%) [\[Question 13\]](#).

Equality policies and training

71.8% of respondents say that their employer keeps them aware of its equality policies [\[Question 14\]](#), with 26.2% of respondents saying they had attended **employer-organised training on equality issues in the last year** [\[Question 15\]](#). This is approximately level with last year’s results.

It is concerning that 38.9% say they have **never** been offered employer-organised training on equality issues.

Discrimination and hate crime

The level of discrimination experienced by UNISON members remains as high as last year, with 32% of respondents reporting that they had been unfairly **discriminated against, unfairly treated, or witnessed this against someone else** in the past year [\[Question 16\]](#).

When survey responses were filtered for gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation and gender identity the results were slightly different, as follows, with Black, LGBT+ and disabled members more likely to have experienced or witnessed unfair treatment or discrimination.

Have you been unfairly discriminated against, or unfairly treated, or witnessed this against someone else in the past year?

Respondents describing themselves as:	Percentage experiencing discrimination, unfair treatment, or witnessing this against someone else
Women	29%
Lesbian, gay or bisexual	38%
Black*	45%
Trans including non-binary**	46%
Disabled	49%

*Responded to the question about ethnic origin by ticking Asian UK, Asian other, Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, Black African, Black Caribbean, Black other, Black mixed heritage, Chinese, or Other mixed heritage.

**Responded to the question about sexuality or gender orientation by ticking ‘transgender’ or ‘another gender identity’

When asked who was responsible for the discrimination or unfair treatment [\[Question 17\]](#), the majority of respondents, 75.0%, said that a **manager** was responsible, with 35.1% saying that a **colleague** was responsible. 6.8% said a **service user** was responsible and

4.7% said a **member of the public (not a service user)** had been responsible for the unfair treatment/discrimination.

The breakdown of experiences of discrimination by protected characteristic [\[Question 18\]](#) is as shown below, with the results for 2018 and 2017 for comparison:

Protected characteristic	2019	2018	2017
Gender	17.7%	16.0%	14.8%
Race	16.8%	12.6%	12.0%
Sexual orientation	6.4%	5.2%	4.8%
Transgender status/gender identity	1.3%	1.3%	1.1%
Disability	25.6%	22.8%	21.9%
Age	17.1%	14.7%	13.6%
Pregnancy/maternity	4.5%	4.6%	4.6%
Marriage/civil partnership	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%
Religion or belief	4.1%	3.6%	3.4%
Friendship with someone/people with the characteristics above	11.5%	11.7%	10.0%
Other	35.7%	39.8%	45.75%

Respondents are asked to tick as many as apply so the results do not sum to 100%.

By far the most common form of discrimination [\[Question 19\]](#) was **bullying, demeaning, humiliating behaviour or harassment**, which 51.2% of respondents said they had experienced. As respondents were asked to tick as many forms as they felt applied, some may have identified multiple forms; the next most frequently experienced forms of discrimination or unfair treatment were: **verbal abuse** (24.7%), **isolation or exclusion from activities or conversations** (23.9%), **over-supervision** (22.4%), **put at a disadvantage by arrangements, assumptions, or expectations that you could not meet/had difficulty meeting due to a protected characteristic** (17.7%), **overlook for promotion or a job role** (17.6%), **refusal of a disability-related request for reasonable adjustments** (16.0%), **changed hours of work or shift pattern** (14.5%) and **refusal of a flexible working request** (14.0%).

It's notable that several of these are related to working patterns and adjustments, which can be key to different groups of members, for example those who need reasonable adjustments for disability, or those who have caring commitments outside of work.

The full breakdown of forms of discrimination experienced is given below, with the results from 2017 and 2018 for comparison.

Form of unfair treatment/discrimination	2019	2018	2017
Bullying, demeaning, humiliating behaviour or harassment	51.2% (highest)	48.3% (highest)	46.4% (highest)
Verbal abuse	24.7%	23.8%	21.9%
Isolation or exclusion from activities, conversations, etc.	23.9%	22.6%	24.2%
Over-supervision	22.4%	19.4%	22.1%
Put at a disadvantage by arrangements, assumptions, or expectations that you could not meet/had difficulty meeting due to a protected characteristic	17.7%	16.2%	15.9%
Overlooked for promotion or a job role	17.6%	15.0%	18.3%
Refusal of a disability-related request for reasonable adjustments	16.0%	12.6%	12.4%

Changed hours of work or shift pattern	14.5%	13.9%	15.3%
Refusal of a flexible working request	14.0%	11.7%	14.7%
Other form of 'punishment/detrimental treatment that ignores your specific needs eg. gender identity, pregnancy, caring responsibilities, etc.	9.3%	8.1%	7.4%
Other	9.2%	11.9%	13.8%
Moved to a physically uncomfortable work environment eg. more cramped, hot, cold, noisy, isolated	8.6%	7.9%	7.3%
Refused benefits or perks offered to others such as training, overtime, partner benefits	8.6%	8.0%	8.6%
Not receiving same pay, terms and conditions, or benefits (such as pension or annual leave) as others doing the same job	8.6%	9.1%	9.0%
Unfair selection for redundancy	3.2%	3.6%	4.2%
Dismissal	3.1%	3.1%	3.8%
Sexual harassment i.e. specifically any unwelcome behaviour of a sexual nature	2.7%	2.8%	2.0%
Physical abuse	1.9%	1.5%	1.0%

Respondents are asked to tick as many as apply so the results do not sum to 100%.

For respondents who reported the unfair treatment or discrimination [\[Question 20\]](#), significantly more (25.5%) found that it was dealt with appropriately when they reported to a **UNISON representative**, rather than their **manager** (10.2%) or their **employer** (10.5%).

Of those who reported the issue, 636 said they had reported it to a UNISON representative, and of those 490 said that the issue was then dealt with appropriately – a strong endorsement for the abilities of UNISON reps, as 77.0% of those who chose a UNISON rep to deal with their concern were happy with the outcome.

However, only 33.2% in total asked a UNISON representative to help them deal with the issue, so there is a question why more respondents did not turn to their trade union rep when they felt they were experiencing discrimination.

When members did not report the incident [\[Question 21\]](#), the most common reason for not doing so was concern that **they might be picked on or victimised** (42.4%) followed by concern that **the issue would not be taken seriously** (34.9%) or that **they personally would not be taken seriously** (31.3%). 22.9% said they were **not sure whether the issue was really discrimination**.

7.5% of UNISON members report **experiencing or witnessing a hate crime or hate incident** in their work over the last year [\[Question 22\]](#), up significantly from the previous year when only 6% of respondents had experienced this. Although nearly half of respondents (48.7%) said that their employers **do have a policy against hate crimes**, 45.5% said their employer **did not have a policy** and 5.8% that they **did not know** about such a policy [\[Question 23\]](#).

Living costs and quality of life

Results show continuing pressure on UNISON members in terms of the cost of living [\[Question 24\]](#), debt levels [\[Question 27\]](#), and benefits [\[Question 28\]](#), in line with results from previous surveys. 36.2% of respondents say their standard of living is **worse than a**

year ago, with only 7.7% reporting it as **better**. The largest increases experienced [[Question 25](#)] are on **council tax** (78.4% report spending more than a year ago), **food** (68.4%), **fuel (gas/electricity)** (65.9%), and **travel to work** (54.5%).

In the last year, 53.8% of respondents report going without **a night out** to help balance their budget, and 47.8% report going without **an annual holiday** [[Question 26](#)]. At the extreme, 13.2% of respondents say they have had to go without a **regular daily meal** to save money.

The below chart shows how UNISON members have answered the question over the last three years:

Compared with a year ago, how would you describe your standard of living?	2019	2018	2017
Worse	36.2%	38.1%	43.3%
About the same	56.2%	53.8%	49.7%
Better	7.7%	8.1%	7.0%

The survey also asked about debt levels and benefits. 27.7% reported **owing more in debt** than they did a year ago [[Question 27](#)], with 27.3% **owing the same amount** and 13.8% **owing less**; figures roughly level with the responses in the 2018 and 2017 surveys. 31.2% said they were **not in debt now and not in debt a year ago** but the majority of respondents report some level of debt.

On the question of benefits [[Question 28](#)], the majority of respondents (83.7%) say they are **not in receipt of benefits now and were not in receipt of benefits a year ago**. However, of those who are in receipt of benefits (including housing benefit, job seekers allowance, disability benefits), nearly half report receiving **less in total benefit** than they did a year ago.

Caring responsibilities

The final question asked as part of the survey focused on caring responsibilities and changes to work patterns (flexible working, etc) in response to caring needs [[Question 29](#)]. 23.1% of respondents had requested that their employer make a change to their work patterns, and of those, 53.5% said their employer had met the request **fully**, 28.6% said the request had been **partially** met, and 17.8% said it had been refused.

A breakdown of responses by gender shows that the majority of those requesting changes were women, with responses from women tending to be higher than the total proportion of women responding to the survey.

Reason to request changes to work pattern:	Total responses	Women	Women as a percentage of the total
Caring for my own child under age 18	792	610	77.0%
Caring for a grandchild under age 18	211	186	88.1%
Caring for another child under age 18	64	51	79.7%
Caring for an adult (anyone over age 18)	666	534	80.2%

This question was unique to the 2019 survey so there are no previous results with which to compare it.

Responses and promotion

There were 9,182 responses to the survey, but of these only 9,030 answered **yes** to the question ‘Are you a UNISON member?’ [\[Question 1\]](#) As the survey was specifically aimed at UNISON members, the responses from those who answered **no** were removed from the analysis and their answers were discarded in compiling this report. However, responses both from those who fully completed the survey and those who only answered some of the questions have been used in the analysis.

The number of respondents was a significant fall on the number of respondents in 2018. This may be due to the fact that the survey did not launch until after National Delegate Conference. However, the number of responses has been volatile over the last few years, with the numbers in 2018 double those received in 2017.

The survey was promoted through UNISON social media and internal communications. It was sent out to all staff through the UNISON daily staff updates, and circulated to Regional secretaries who were asked to promote it through regional channels.

The majority of responses (54%) were from those who had been members of the union for more than 11 years [\[Question 2\]](#).

The breakdown of subscription bands [\[Question 3\]](#) roughly (not exactly) matches up with UNISON’s overall membership, with more respondents to be found towards the top of the subscription scale.

Likewise the proportion of members in different service groups [\[Question 4\]](#) matches roughly to UNISON’s membership as a whole, but there are slightly disparities which may point to the different success in getting people to answer the survey across service groups or branches:

Service Group	Survey respondents	UNISON membership*
Community	4.6%	6.6%
Energy	3.4%	1.1%
Health care	32.5%	39.1%
Higher education	10.8%	2.6%
Local government	33.6%	46.4%
Police and justice	5.9%	3.1%
Water, environment and transport	1.6%	1.1%
Don't know	7.5%	(all UNISON members are allocated to a Service Group on joining)

*data from RMS

As expected, the vast majority of respondents to the survey (85.9%) work in the **public sector**, with 8.7% in the **private sector** and 2.2% in the **voluntary sector** [\[Question 5\]](#). When we break down the 754 responses from those who answer that they work in the private sector, they fall into the different service groups as follows, which points to the ways in which different areas of public services are more or less likely to be privatised or outsourced:

Service Group	Survey respondents working in the private sector
Community	9.3%
Energy	25.9%
Health care	32.4%
Higher education	9.3%
Local government	6.4%
Police and justice	2.3%
Water, environment and transport	6.8%
Don't know	7.8%

The Regional breakdown [\[Question 6\]](#) is also similar to the results for UNISON members as a whole but shows some discrepancies, with some regions clearly having more success in promoting the survey to their members:

Region	Survey respondents	UNISON membership*
Eastern	5.8%	6.5%
East Midlands	8.6%	6.8%
Greater London	6.4%	9.1%
Northern	9.5%	6.2%
Northern Ireland	1.8%	3.5%
North West	11.6%	14.8%
Scotland	7.7%	12.6%
South East	10.7%	7.9%
South West	10.2%	6.4%
Cymru/Wales	3.9%	7.2%
West Midlands	7.2%	8.8%
Yorkshire and Humberside	15.7%	10.4%
Don't know		(all UNISON members are allocated to a Region on joining)

*data from RMS

74.3% of respondents describe themselves as **female** and 24.4% **male**, with 0.5% describing their gender in another way and 0.8% preferring not to answer [\[Question 31\]](#). This reflects UNISON's membership as a whole, where 76.8% of members are women.

The breakdown by ethnic origin [\[Question 32\]](#) is difficult to compare in a tabulated way to the UNISON membership as a whole, as the way UNISON records ethnic origin has changed through the years and so the categories used in the survey do not match up precisely with the data held on RMS. However, it is noticeable that 83.0% of respondents to the survey describe themselves as **White UK**, but only 61.1% of UNISON members, excluding those whose ethnic origin is recorded as **Unknown**, describe themselves as **White UK** or **White** (this category is no longer used for new joiners, who are asked to describe themselves as White UK or White Other). This suggests that white respondents are over-represented in the survey and next year's survey should aim to achieve a considerably higher response rate from Black members.

17.6% of respondents described themselves as disabled [\[Question 33\]](#). This is much higher than the percentage describing themselves as disabled on UNISON's membership system, but this is not a reliable comparison, as the information about disability recorded when members join does not necessarily reflect their current situation.

The data held by UNISON on members' gender identity or sexual orientation is not adequate to make a meaningful comparison with the survey responses, so it is difficult to tell whether the responses from LGBT+ members [\[Question 34\]](#) accurately reflect the experiences of the membership as a whole.

Conclusion

The results of the 2019 survey demonstrate that equality issues are still a vital area for UNISON in its organising, bargaining, and campaigning work.

Some encouraging results point to UNISON's successes, such as the high rate of satisfaction with representation by UNISON stewards in addressing workplace discrimination; others suggest potential bargaining demands like improved equalities policies, better equalities training, and working with employers to develop policies on hate crime. The responses on participation in UNISON point to some ways that branches and regions could continue to improve the levels of member activity across the union.

The responses to the questions about debt, benefits and living standards give a picture of a membership experiencing continuing effects of government austerity and slow wage growth. Although there has not been a dramatic change compared to previous years, members continue to describe reductions to benefits, high numbers of members with household debt, and continuing financial constraints.

Overall, the survey provides a useful snapshot of some of the equality issues facing UNISON members and shows that continuing to fight against inequality and discrimination in all its forms must remain a key priority across the union.