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**UNISON EQUALITY TEAM: WHAT WE DO**

**Overview**

UNISON equality unit is UNISON’s specialist team that advises on strategic equality priorities. We work directly with UNISON’s six equality groups, Black, disabled, LGBT+, women, young and retired members; the NEC and national service groups.

We provide guidance and support to branches and regions, assisting them in promoting equality and tackling discrimination in their recruitment and organising, bargaining, campaigning and in how this work is carried out.

We advise the union on meeting its rulebook commitments on equality and anti-discrimination, including tackling under-representation. We support lay democracy, including the national equality conferences and committees set out in the rulebook.

Our work implements UNISON objectives and priorities and takes forward decisions of national delegate conference and the conferences of UNISON’s six equality groups.

So what do we actually do?

**Recruiting and organising**

UNISON’s equality profile attracts workers into membership. Our team directly supports recruitment by:

* Co-ordinating recruiting teams at scores of prides, carnivals, festivals and melas across the UK, working with regional and branch self-organised groups
* Providing targeted recruitment materials aimed at underrepresented groups of members, and guides on how to use these for workplace events during eg Black History Month, Disability History Month, LGBT+ History Month, Young Workers Month, International Women’s Day, World Menopause Day, Equal Pay Day etc
* Training members of the equality groups in active recruiting, providing sample recruitment scripts
* Specific initiatives such as the year of the young worker, which has led to increased recruitment of young members and a focus on developing young activists
* Initiatives such as the new young Black members recruitment video ‘Why I joined UNISON’, promoted on social media
* Publicising recruitment awards such as the LGBT+ awards, young Black members award, Nelson Mandela award

We support branch equality organising. For example we:

* Provide guidance on self-organisation and young members’ organisation, including how to set up branch groups, and 10 good reasons why every branch should have self-organised groups
* Produce regular e-bulletins and newsletters to encourage branch equality organising and campaigning, with examples of branch best practice
* Hold annual training for branch SOG officers, training scores of activists each year
* Have drop in sessions and workshops on branch organising at national SOG and young members conferences
* Are mapping young members and developing young members mentoring schemes, with a particular focus on young Black members
* Have guidance for reps on representing trans members, deaf members and disabled members
* Facilitate communication and promote best practice among regional self-organised, young and retired members groups, by organising regular meetings of regional equality contact officers and regional lay member contacts, regular electronic communication and dedicated resources

**Supporting bargaining and workplace rights**

We identify and publicise members’ experiences at work, particularly members facing disadvantage. For example:

* Annual members equality survey, collecting information on experiences of workplace discrimination, participation in UNISON, and changing material circumstances
* Joint UNISON/Nursing Times survey of sexual harassment of nursing staff June 2021
* Women’s survey February 2021
* Survey of Black members July 2020
* Let’s be Reasonable: Disability Equality in the workplace survey November 2019

Based on the experiences highlighted by our surveys, our team produces accessible equality bargaining guides for branches, with checklists and model policies. For example, topics based on members’ experiences during the pandemic include:

* Bargaining to support those who were previously shielding
* Bargaining to support those with long-Covid or post Covid-19 syndrome
* Risk Assessment for Black and Vulnerable Workers
* Covid-19 know your rights: Guidance for Black members
* Covid-19 know your rights: Guidance for disabled members and members with underlying health conditions
* Pregnant workers and Covid-19

All are downloadable from the UNISON website.

We are part of the bargaining and equality directorate and work closely with service groups. In collaboration with service groups, our team provides direct advice to branches negotiating new or improved equality policies. For example, we are working with:

* Trailblazer branches in local government and higher education (and exploring possibilities in other sectors) developing action plans to tackle the gender pay gap
* Local government and police and justice branches negotiating new or improved transgender equality policies
* Energy branches negotiating new or improved disability leave policies
* Private contractors using Disability Confident to negotiate improved disability equality policies
* Health branches identifying and tackling race discrimination through the health group’s Race for Equality campaign
* Higher education branches on challenging racism in the workplace

We also work with national employers and leaders, for example:

* With NHS England to develop the new Workplace Disability Equality Standard, which we are following up work on using the WDES with individual branches
* With the National Association of Head Teachers on their first guide to supporting LGB+ and trans staff
* With NHS Employers on a new workplace menopause policy
* Discussions on ethnic pay gap and racial harassment with higher education employers

In 2021, we have a particular focus on working from home and flexibility, sickness absence and mental health.

**Defending services and challenging austerity**

We provide equality intelligence to UNISON campaigns to support quality public services and challenge austerity programmes

For example:

* Identifying the experiences of disabled members from welfare cuts, including cuts to in-work benefits
* Work with local government service group on cuts to youth services
* Briefings on the equality dimension of UNISON’s campaign to cut crime, not services
* Highlighting the equality angle in UNISON’s ethical care campaign
* Commissioning unique research into the LGBT+ equality impact of austerity, assisted by the Campaign Fund
* Highlighting the impact of cuts to services and threats to universal benefits on older people

**Campaigning for equality**

We research, plan and lead UNISON equality campaigns, for example:

* #OneWageAnyAge campaign to end the age-based differential minimum wage rates
* Equality impact of Brexit
* Ending equality pay gaps – gender, ethnicity and disability
* Tackling sexual harassment
* Pensions equality
* Tackling workplace hate and campaigning for strengthened hate crime legislation
* Improving legal rights to reasonable adjustments
* Raising awareness of mental health as a workplace issue
* Windrush: lessons learnt campaign

We are UNISON’s link to important community and campaign partners, for example:

* Show Racism the Red Card, Stand Up To Racism, Tell Mama, Operation Black Vote, Hope not Hate
* Equally Ours, Disability Rights UK, WASPI, Backto60, National Pensioners Convention
* UK Black Pride, Scottish Trans Alliance, the Equality Network, ILGA
* Maternity Action, End Violence Against Women (EVAW), White Ribbon and #March4Women

We brief UNISON MPs and lobby government, for example:

* Parliamentary briefings on the minimum wage and ending the age-based differential, domestic violence, gender recognition reform, workplace reasonable adjustments
* Regular meetings with the Shadow Secretary of State, Department of Work and Pensions, and regular roundtables with the Shadow Chancellor and Shadow Minister for Disabled People on welfare reform
* Active membership of LGBT+ Labour, Disability Labour and BAME Labour

We research, write and submit UNISON’s responses to consultations on equality law and policy, for example for Government and Parliamentary consultations and inquiries on:

* Menopause and the workplace (Women and Equalities Committee - 2021)
* Covid 19 – an equal recovery? (Treasury Select Committee 2021)

We write the equality input into UNISON responses to other consultations and inquiries for example:

* Low Pay Commission consultation on national minimum wage and national living wage (annual)
* Labour Party National Policy Forum consultations (2021)

We are working with the Equality and Human Rights Commission on the disability pay gap. Work is underway on the racial disparity pay gap.

**Promoting equality in UNISON**

Our team supports lay democracy, facilitating the national work of the six equality groups set out in UNISON rule: Black members, disabled members, LGBT+ members, retired members, women members and young members.

This is a significant proportion of our work and is vital in ensuring UNISON’s equality work reflects members’ concerns. For example, we plan, prepare and deliver:

* 3 to 4 meetings of each national committee and their working groups,
* Implementation of these national committees’ decisions and annual workplans, based on their conference resolutions and UNISON objectives and priorities
* Initiatives to address intersectionality, addressing fair representation within each equality group and bringing groups of under-represented members together to identify issues and barriers
* Liaison between the national equality groups, the NEC and service groups
* The policy and programme side of UNISON’s six annual equality conferences, and work with the conference team to deliver their organisation, making sure all conferences support and encourage branch activism

Perhaps counter-intuitively, attending a national UNISON equality conference regularly provides the necessary nudge to encourage members to become branch activists. We have seen it happen over and again. Many leading national activists and branch secretaries started off in young members or self-organisation.

We advise all parts of the union on improving participation and meeting UNISON’s rules on fair representation and proportionality. For example we:

* Produce regularly updated guidance on implementing UNISON equality rules
* Are developing pilots with regions on encouraging participation of low paid women
* Work with service groups on tackling under-representation on their national committees
* Are partners in UNISON’s projects on improving participation in lay democracy
* Work with all parts of the union to make UNISON more inclusive for non-binary members

We provide an expert resource on equality for other UNISON teams that support branches. We produce a range of equality guidance and hold regular equality seminars and briefings for UNISON staff. We work closely with:

* Service groups and negotiators, as set out above
* Regional equality leads and regional SOG, young members and retired members contacts
* Regional organisers, providing individual advice on workplace and equality organising queries
* Learning and organising services on dedicated equality training and equality in all training for UNISON activists, plus the resources to support this
* Labour Link on briefing UNISON MPs and securing UNISON’s equality objectives in Labour Party policy and practice
* The policy team on equality in UNISON campaigns and policy development
* The communications team, providing a link to the diversity of UNISON members and their concerns
* The strategic organising unit on the equality content of the online Organising Space
* The Campaign Fund, overseeing equality bids and their delivery
* Membership services on making sure we meet the needs of the full diversity of our members
* The international team, on taking UNISON’s equality agenda forward within labour internationals and with sister unions

**Equality and the TUC**

We lead UNISON’s equality work with the TUC, co-ordinating:

* Representation on TUC equality committees
* UNISON’s input into TUC equality conferences
* UNISON’s responses to TUC equality consultations, surveys and campaigns.

**Further information**

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[www.unison.org.uk/equality](http://www.unison.org.uk/equality)

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