



# **NATIONAL YOUNG MEMBERS FORUM**

ANNUAL REPORT

2020-2021



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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **from the Chair of the National Young Members Forum**

Dear friends,

It's been a challenging and strange year for all young members and I couldn't be prouder to have been your Chair during this difficult year. My thoughts are with all UNISON members and their family members who have been affected by Covid.

I've seen the way that young members have come together to support one another in our branches, regions and workplaces. Many young members have worked on the front line during the pandemic in our hospitals, schools and care homes and because of that, this conference is even more important.

Despite the challenges there's been great achievements from our members this year. In my region, the East Midlands, we were recently able to hold a social event, supported by Leicester City Local Government branch. Other Regional Forums have had creative ideas to stay connected during lockdown via zoom holding socials and games nights. Through our webinars we have built a stronger bond with our members and it has been great to see so many new young members become active and attend this conference.

There was also a win for our One Wage Any Age campaign, a campaign led by young members in UNISON. 23- and 24-year-olds were included in the National Living Wage for the first time. UNISON's young members have campaigned for all workers to receive the full minimum wage rate and this was a small but positive step forward in our campaign. We also continue our work on the Young Workers Charter and hope more employers will sign up to this.

Lastly, thank you so much for being part of our first ever Young Members Conference! We will be keen to hear your feedback on ways we can improve for next year. I hope you enjoy conference, learn as much as you can, network with others but most importantly, be kind to each other.

Jess McGuire

Chair

National Young Members Forum



## OVERVIEW

In an unprecedented period for everyone in the country UNISON's young members have continued to organise, campaign and make sure that the voice of young members is heard across UNISON and the trade union movement.

This report, presented to the first ever National Young Members Conference, covers the activities of UNISON's Young Members during 2020 and 2021.

The Young Members Weekend scheduled for May 2020 was one of the first UNISON events cancelled following the lockdown in March 2020. Despite the setback and challenges of the pandemic, young members across the union have risen to the occasion, adapted to the needs for home working, social distancing and online meetings, and have continued and working at branch, regional and national level over the last two years.

Part of that plan has been the organisation and preparation for the first ever Young Members Conference from 3-5 December 2021 in Cardiff. Planning for the young members conference started after a rule change from the National Young Members Forum (NYMF) was carried at UNISON's National Delegate Conference in 2019. The Forum have been fully involved in planning for Conference 2021 including a consultation of regions on how conference should work.

Although we still have some restrictions on activity at conference, in order to make sure that everyone attending is as safe as possible, it is a pleasure to welcome young members from across the country to what we hope will be the first of many young members' conferences.

## **THE NATIONAL YOUNG MEMBERS FORUM**

The National Young Members Forum (NYMF) is UNISON's national committee representing young members. Every region nominates two delegates to the Forum, and the two NEC representatives for young members also sit on the Forum. It meets formally four times a year.

The NYMF adapted quickly to online meetings and has met regularly over the last two years, including formal committee meetings, working groups to discuss communications and the Forum's workplan, and meetings to make nominations for the NEC and to agree the endorsement of a candidate in the General Secretary election in late 2020.

During that time David Coleman, the Chair of the NYMF from July 2019, 'aged out' of young membership when he turned 27 and Jess McGuire was elected Chair to replace him. We'd like to thank David for his work on behalf of young members and for leading the Forum during the very difficult period as we adjusted to the constraints of the pandemic.

The Forum had a formal AGM in April 2021, welcoming many new regional delegates, electing new officers and nominating Forum members as delegates to conferences and committees. We also agreed a workplan for 2021-22, focusing on mental health, the recruitment and development of young activists, political employment and education, and working with other parts of the union on issues important to young workers such as the climate, Black Lives Matter, and sexual harassment.

A small working group met to discuss communications between and by the Forum and to agree a plan to improve communication with all young members. Watch this space as we intend to revamp our social media and communicate more regularly with young members from 2022 onwards.

## **RECRUITMENT AND ORGANISING**

Recruitment of young members continues to go from strength to strength in UNISON, with an increase in recruitment of young members year on year for the last few years.

To support branches and regions wanting to make a plan to recruit more young members, in April 2020 we commissioned some mapping research from the Labour Research Department on young workers in the public sector. Available on the UNISON website, this is a comprehensive piece of work which uses statistical data and Freedom of Information requests to give a detailed picture of where young people work across the public sector. It is broken down by sector and by region and so can be used to identify fruitful areas for recruiting young workers into UNISON and to give a snapshot of the young workforce across the employment sectors that UNISON represents.

However, young members are relatively under-represented among activists, so one of the priorities of UNISON's NYMF has been to encourage more young people to come forward as active members of the union and take roles as stewards, branch officers, and committee members at regional and national level.

To this end we have hosted several webinars aimed at encouraging young members to get more involved in our union. These included 'What does a Young Members Officer do?' a combination of presentation and panel discussion from active and former Young Members Officers, which we hosted in April 2021 and again in November 2021 to mark TUC Young Workers month; 'Organising and recruiting young workers', hosted in March 2021, when we invited the TUC Young Workers Officer to give us a perspective covering the wider trade union movement; and a briefing in November 2020 about UNISON's Be On the Safe Side campaign. The pandemic has shown us how important health and safety reps are in workplaces so we organised a young member-led panel discussion where young Health and Safety officers talked about the realities of the role.

In November 2020 we surveyed UNISON's young members on their experiences of getting active and participating in UNISON, and collected our findings in a report called 'Getting Active in UNISON'. The report included a number of recommendations to branches and regions interested in getting more young members active and involved in

UNISON. We presented this report to the Development and Organising sub-committee of the National Executive Council where it was well received.

Next year we will be taking forward a long-term plan of the NYMF: the Young Members' Pathway to Activism, an online resource aimed at bringing together all the information and educational resources young members may need to get more active in UNISON.

## **BARGAINING AND EQUALITIES**

The Young Workers' Charter was launched at the end of 2019 to highlight the bargaining and workplace priorities most important to young members and to encourage employers to take action on the key concerns of younger workers: pay, fair contracts, equality at work, decent apprenticeships and development and progression activities.

The NYMF has continued to work with Service Groups to promote the importance of the charter, including at the Local Government Seminar and Private Contractors Seminar.

We also worked with the Local Government Service Group to promote their recently developed advice and guidance on mentoring young Black activists in Local Government branches.

In November 2020 we surveyed young members about Covid and what they hoped to see after the pandemic. Their responses have informed our approach to consultations and work with branches, regions and service groups. We will be conducting another survey in January 2022 on young workers and mental health.

Erk Gunce and Jess McGuire sit on the Equality Liaison Committee as representatives from the NYMF. The Equality Liaison Committee brings together the NEC representatives with representatives from the National Self-Organised Group Committees and National Young Members Forum and gives

## **CAMPAIGNING AND INFLUENCING**

Following a call out for evidence by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Affairs in September 2020, UNISON submitted evidence to their inquiry into the economic impact of the pandemic on young people.

Basing our evidence on some of the surveys we have done of young UNISON members, we highlighted concerns about unemployment, housing, mental health and the long term impact that insecure work and housing can have on young people. We also stressed that the risk of unemployment and homelessness can be higher for young Black and LGBT+ people, young women, and young migrants. We made the case for improved funding for Further Education and Youth Services to mitigate the impact of the economic downturn on young people.

We also organised a webinar in November 2020 as part of TUC Young Workers Month on the question of the post-pandemic recovery and the importance of making sure young workers were not left behind. We were joined by Cat Smith MP, Labour's Shadow Minister for Children and Young People, who spoke about the importance of addressing mental health in young people and in making sure that recovery from the pandemic included young workers.

The following year, for TUC Young Workers Month 2021, we wanted to highlight the importance of the fight against climate change. Ahead of the COP26 climate summit we organised a webinar with guest speakers from Friends of the Earth, the COP26 Coalition, UNISON and the trade union federation Public Services International. We were pleased to bring together international trade unionists and campaigners and to encourage UNISON's young members to get more involved in protests around the COP26 summit.

### **Labour Link**

Jamie Dickinson attended the 2021 Labour Link Forum on behalf of the NYMF, and Jess McGuire was part of the 2021 UNISON delegation to the Labour Party Conference, about which she reported:

*"I enjoyed being a delegate to Labour Party Conference and found the experience interesting. It was very different to a UNISON conference and was also the first physical conference under Keir Starmer's leadership. There were some key debates on rule*

*changes and also a lot of important topics were covered such as Violence Against Women and Girls.*

*During the debates and the voting, this was my first experience of seeing the influence that unions have on the Labour Party and their policies. I found the conference very inspiring and would recommend anyone to attend that has an interest in politics and the trade union movement.”*

### **Trades Union Congress**

UNISON’s young members continue to be fully involved in the Trades Union Congress (TUC) Young Workers Forum. The 2020 Young Workers Conference scheduled for April 2020 was sadly cancelled due to the pandemic, but the April 2021 went ahead in an online format. UNISON’s motions on mental health and the post-pandemic recovery were supported by the online conference.

In 2021 we were also proud to re-nominate former Chair of the UNISON NYMF, Kendal Bromley-Bewes, for election as the Vice-Chair of the TUC Young Workers Forum and she was successfully re-elected. She is not seeking re-election next year and we thank her for her work on the TUC Forum and before then as Chair of UNISON’s NYMF and NEC representative (Young Members seat) from 2019-21.

The UNISON NYMF also nominates one member to form part of UNISON’s delegation to the TUC Congress and our nominee this year was Erk Gunce.

## UNISON CONFERENCES

Over the last two years many UNISON conferences have been cancelled or postponed as UNISON has made the health and safety of our members its first priority. We have also adapted to an online environment, with some conferences taking place online in order to maximise participation while social distancing has been necessary.

Luca Mambro-Moor and Millie Davidson represented the NYMF at the UNISON Special Delegate Conference (SDC) in June 2021. This was the first national delegate conference to be held online. The NYMF submitted two motions to SDC, and Motion 5, *Young workers and mentally healthy workplaces*, was debated and carried by conference. Motion 28, *Secure Futures: Young Workers and the Post Covid Recovery* was not reached on the agenda and like all other unreached business will be considered by the National Executive Council (NEC) in the course of the year.

Luca reported:

*“This year I attended SDC as the delegate for the NYMF where I moved Motion 5 - Young Workers and mentally healthy workplaces. The motion builds on the issues we’ve been discussing at the NYMF, and calls on the union to promote & campaign for better education and support for young workers, making the link between mental health and working conditions as a causes for issues such as Anxiety, Depression & ‘Burn Out’. I’m pleased to say the motion was carried.*

*This was my first conference, and while circumstances meant it was not held in person this year, it was great to have the continued solidarity of the Retired Members who also supported our motion, and shows how the union can come together to discuss the issues that our members face. It was moving to hear stories from frontline workers across the public sector sharing their experiences of working during the pandemic, and was a reminder of the importance of unions, and why we all chose to fight for these causes. I hope to attend again at some point in the future.”*

On behalf for the NYMF, Elliott Carter and Millie Davidson attended the Special Health Conference which took place online in September 2021.

Rachel Braim and Charlotte Clifton represented the Forum at the Police and Justice Conference which was held in Brighton in October 2021. Elliott Carter attended UNISON's LGBT+ conference in Brighton in November 2021.

If you would be interested in representing the National Young Members Forum at a national Service Group or Self-Organised Group conference in 2022, please get in touch with your regional delegates to the National Young Members Forum and let them know.

## **REGIONAL REPORTS**

The Regional Young Members Forums continue to be a key site for young members to meet, network, organise and campaign.

Regional Young Member Forums are open to all young members interested in getting involved in their local areas – you don't have to be delegated by your branch to go along – and organise local campaigns and projects.

Every Regional Forum can elect an officer group and nominates two young members to represent the Region on the National Young Members Forum. If you are interested in getting more involved in your regional forum, contact your Regional Young Members Forum; details are available here:

### **North West**

In the North West the pandemic has affected our ability to organise face to face, but we have held some online events which have been well attended, including *An Introduction to UNISON for Young Members* and *Know Your Rights*.

We have also linked up with the Student Recruitment team to extend our reach and have also worked with the North West Regional Women's Committee on the Smear on Demand Campaign.

We now look forward to linking up with the LGBT+ Committee in 2022 to hopefully jointly attend Pride events across the region.

### **Northern**

Over the last couple of years we have found ways to adapt to the current climate of COVID19 to ensure that our Young Members activists across the region can continue the important recruitment and representation of young workers. We've continued to hold our monthly meetings via Teams and have kept up with our regular social media posts about UNISON campaigns that specifically effect young members, as well as holding a survey for young members across the region to find out what their priorities are to ensure that the regional group can reflect these.

We've continued to be focussed on recruitment, with young members attending local and regional events to support recruitment activity from their branches and beyond. We've held a number of prize draws for members and new joiners, and have revamped our Young Members Guide to UNISON booklet to better reflect issues young members face (especially in the light of COVID), which has been sent to branches to help support their recruitment of young members.

At our AGM, following discussion with our Regional Secretary, Young Members devised a mentoring programme, where long standing activists were paired with newer activists to support them in becoming active within the regional network and their branches. As part of this, work was done identifying where branches were

lacking Young Members officers, to ensure that focus could be put on identifying and developing new young activists.

## **Scotland**

**The Pandemic and Young Members:** The Scottish Young Members Committee struggled to maintain activity during the first year of the pandemic. As public service workers on the frontline, we have faced the same challenges as everyone; we are health, local government and care workers, parents, and carers, and we all saw our working and home lives change dramatically.

With our focus on our day jobs and with the lack of facility time available to young members, only local union activity was possible. We met informally online and stayed in touch via our group chat to share information/experiences, and to help each other deal with covid issues in our workplaces. However, campaigning activities were put on hold and there was limited time for training or communications.

We also lost key members of the committee due to job losses, “ageing out”, job changes and in some cases, members decided to return to full time education.

**AGM:** The Young Members Committee held their AGM on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

Millie Davidson, a Nurse with Tayside Health Branch, was once again elected as Chair, with Cameron Thompson, a Local Government worker with Western Isles LG Branch, elected as Vice-Chair. Both were voted as the Scottish Young Members Committee delegates to the National Young Members Forum.

**Future Campaign Work:** There has been much discussion around future plans for the committee, the need for succession planning to replace the members we have lost and those due to turn 27 in the next couple of years. We know our weekend training offerings facilitated by our full-time officer are key to activating new young members and are hopeful that we will be able to hold our next one in person in early 2022.

As our delegate to the Scottish Women’s Committee, Millie Davidson has been attending various online events including the TUC’s training on Domestic Abuse. This has been identified as a campaigning focus for the committee moving forward. We are currently promoting UN Women’s “16 days of activism against gender-based violence” online, and plan to raise awareness of member rights among our membership around the new statutory guidance brought in for employers based on the new Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

The Climate Crisis has also become an important issue to our committee. With COP26 being held in Glasgow, the committee showed solidarity by supporting the youth strikes on 5<sup>th</sup> November, by attending the march and rally on the 6<sup>th</sup> November, and attending UNISON’s Green Report launch on the 8<sup>th</sup> November.

One of our members, Rob Nicolson, has undertaken the pilot “Green Rep” training and is now the Environmental Officer for NHS Glasgow and Clyde Branch, the largest UNISON branch in the UK. The Branch have amended their constitution to include this

role and as AGM season approaches, the committee plan on raising awareness with other branches in Scotland, to encourage them to do the same.

**Cuba May Day Youth Brigade:** We have secured regional and branch funding to send two delegates from the committee on the Cuba Solidarity Campaigns May Day Youth Brigade. The Scottish Region has a long history of sending young members on this life changing trip to Cuba and are delighted it can go ahead again in 2022.

**National Conference:** The committee look forward to the in person and first ever rule book National Conference in Cardiff. We believe it will be a great experience and are enthused that a number of new young members have come forward to fill our delegation.

## **South East**

Over the last few months, the South East Young Members' Forum have been busy planning events to encourage and support young members involvement in the Forum and wider union structures. At our latest virtual meeting we discussed the Regional YM AGM, National Young Members' Conference and Regional Young Members' Day. The Forum invited visitors along to the meeting as a way of engaging new activists.

As November is Young Workers' Month, we have advertised a range events and activities planned to raise the profile of young workers. Due to the National Young Members' Forum having a motion passed regarding young workers and mentally healthy workplaces at SDC this year, it was decided that we would use mental health as our theme for the month. We launched a social media campaign, highlighting some of the harrowing statistics of the declining mental health of young workers. One of our key young activists has written a blog to share their experiences of being an active young member in UNISON and to try and encourage others to get involved. This has been published on the SE Region website and in the SE Activist circular. A Young Workers' Month Special newsletter is also being circulated to promote young workers and the issues they are facing as well as advertising the various events happening regionally and nationally within UNISON, as well as the TUC.

The Regional Young Members' Day, held on 19th November at UNISON Centre, has now taken place. The day covered two main themes 'Your Rights at Work' and 'Imposter Syndrome & Young Workers', with TUC LESE Regional Secretary, Sam Gurney as a guest speaker. The Forum noted that encouraging young members to attend meetings and events has been difficult over the past few months and unfortunately, we did not see the best turnout at the day. Going forward into 2022 and with the momentum from the National Conference, we hope to use future events as an opportunity to attract young members from different branches to network and build organisation among young people in their workplaces.

The Forum had to postpone the AGM, which was due to be held on 4th November, and are now working towards a new date and time 27th January 2022 at 4.30pm. We are aware that some members of the Forum will be unable to stand for their

positions again and so we will be working hard to encourage new members to come forward.

## **South West**

In Spring 2020 meetings were suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In August 2020 we sent out a survey to young members in the region to find out about how they would like to get involved with UNISON, potential barriers they face to getting involved and interest in educational workshops and sessions. We also asked which days, times and platforms would be best for online meetings. We had over 300 responses and followed up with many members who were interested in roles in UNISON. In November we started having online forum meetings. These are now happening every other month on MS Teams. In Spring 2021 we elected a new committee and regional reps.

We also wrote a guide for branches on engaging young workers, and an accompanying workshop. We have run this with South Somerset branch and ran a joint session for two branches in Dorset.

In 2021 the group has been developing a campaign on the topic of the 'right to disconnect'. The Right to Disconnect is the ability to not engage in work-related electronic communications such as e-mails or messages during non-work hours. In June 2021, we designed and distributed a survey with the aim of capturing the experiences of young members in the region. We received 82 responses from across the South-West region, which clearly showed the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted quite negatively on the wellbeing and work/life balance of young members. We held a motion writing workshop and the group have put forward a motion on this topic to the National Young Members Conference in Cardiff in December. We have also held two workshops on how to build and win a campaign, and will be moving forward with the next stage of the campaign development soon.

A group of young members attended the South-West Regional Council at Croyde Bay in October 2021, to learn about UNISON's regional structures. We presented to the whole meeting about the campaign, to encourage branches and committees to take up the issue. We have also had lots of fun online socials, including a quiz night and a games night, and even managed one in person social in September.



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