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The newsletter on LGBT+ equality UNISON

# Reconnecting again!

Lucy Power and Neil Adams, co-chairs national LGBT+ committee



In our first issue since the LGBT+ Conference in Brighton in November 2021, we would like to thank all of you who attended. Reconnecting with friends and activists, it almost felt like we were back to a typical conference.

**That wasn't the entire story though, many of our LGBT+ activists were unable to join us, either because they were isolating at home, or not quite confident enough to join such a large gathering. To those activists – you were all missed, and our thoughts were with you.**

A large number of motions passed at conference focussed on Trans Workers and Young Workers. As a result, the LGBT+ National Committee is focussing on two prominent campaigns using the

actions called for in those motions. You will hear more when the campaigns launch – we hope you are as excited as we are.

Later in this edition we have an article about the National Committee's motions to National Delegates' Conference in Brighton, one of which is focussed specifically on our Trans members. We urge you to support these motions. We always have delegates at National Conference, this year it is Jackie and Maz. If you are thinking of speaking in support of our motions, or need to know more, they are happy to help.

With all the bad news at the moment, one prominent aspect has been the vitriol faced by our Trans community. These daily attacks are a new low for the LGBT+ community. The issue was intensified by the government's U-turn on the ban on conversion therapy, which excluded our Trans colleagues. This was further compounded by the government announcing its first International LGBT+ Conference "Safe To Be Me".

What they actually meant was Safe to be me, unless you're Trans! Stonewall wrote an open letter, signed by a number of LGBT+ charities and organisations, which said they would not lend their ▶

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support to the event unless Boris Johnson included transgender people in the ban on conversion therapy. Eventually the conference had to be cancelled after more than 100 organisations withdrew their support when it became clear that the government would press ahead with its exclusionary ban. Even the government's own LGBT+ business champion resigned saying, 'Trust and belief in the government's overall commitment to LGBT+ rights has been damaged.' Our Prime minister has also openly stated he does not believe transgender women should compete in female sporting events. If we were ever in any doubt about Tory commitment to the LGBT+ community, recent actions have made quite clear what their real position is.

You can find a number of factsheet resources about how to support our Trans colleagues on the LGBT+ pages of UNISON's website ([www.unison.org/out](http://www.unison.org/out)),

We are also going to be launching our Trans campaign at the Trans network meeting in July.

On a more positive note, an almost 'traditional' Pride Season approaches. We've been waiting for this for two very long years. Certainly, in most regions, there is a jam-packed calendar of events planned. We would like to remind you of our 'Pride in Procurement' fact sheet. There are brilliant tips on working with Pride Committees to encourage an ethical approach to resourcing for Pride events. We need to ensure that our enjoyment, demonstration of our collective identity, and Pride are not impacting negatively on our fellow workers across the globe.

Pride events are a great opportunity to recruit members and activists. Every year at our conference we announce our Recruitment and Organising Awards. Last year the award was shared by the North West and Northern Ireland regions. The

South East won it in 2019, and it was a very proud moment for our own co-chair, Lucy. Is this the year for your region?

Still on the subject of Prides, it is worth noting that UNISON has declared this year the Year of Disabled Workers. There is more about this later in this edition. We can all support this work by ensuring Prides in our regions are fully accessible. Some regions are using accessibility as a criteria for deciding which Prides to sponsor. A great way of showing solidarity with the disabled LGBT+ community.

We hope you all have a wonderful Pride season, and stay safe. Enjoy this issue, and we look forward to seeing those of you who attend the various Network Days later in the year.

In closing, we would like to say a very big thank you to Carola Towle, there is more about Carola inside this edition – but we would like to say Carola, enjoy your retirement. You've earned it!!

# National Delegate Conference – making changes one motion at a time



Lucy Power – co-chair, national LGBT+ committee

**The national LGBT+ committee motions to UNISON's national delegate conference 2022 are areas of work that we have campaigned on for a number of years.**

Motion 55 – For safety – end support for the Nordic Model

Motion 89 – Equality for trans women – Louder and Prouder!

We are proud to announce that both of these were passed at National Delegates conference.

## **Motion 89: Equality for Trans women – Louder and Prouder!**

Eileen Best, and Sophie Robinson, National Committee LGBT+ members, spoke at the National Women's Conference on our motion in support of Trans women. Eileen moved the motion with a powerful speech highlighting the fact that there is a movement in Britain that seeks to eradicate all the hard fought for rights that trans people

have won. Eileen emphasised the tears and sacrifices made on the road to where we now find ourselves. These rights were not just handed to us on a plate, or by some overnight law which allowed people the freedoms they now have. These are rights that we, as LGBT+ people, as trade unionists, and as decent human beings have fought long and hard for.

The speech also highlighted the spread of misinformation coming from the far right, not just in Britain but throughout Europe and beyond. Concerns were voiced around the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), with calls for a special review following recent concerns about their independence specifically around trans people. This comes following the EHRC's attempt to intervene with the Scottish Government's reform of the Gender Recognition Act and also their response to the British Government's

consultation on banning so called "conversion therapy" asking instead for a ban which would cover sexual orientation but leave our trans community completely unprotected. Even more concerning is the fact that the government listened.

As the saying goes "first they came for...", so Eileen called on Women's Conference to stand with our Trans sisters.

Sophie focussed on her own experience as a Trans woman. Her message was simple: **"I am a trans woman. I was assigned male at birth. I will never dispute that. But I am also a human being and I am entitled to dignity and respect. If I were to cause harm to others, I should be judged on my actions and punished appropriately. But I should never be judged just for being who I am!"**

Women's conference did not disappoint, and the motion was overwhelmingly passed. ►



## Motion 55: For Safety – End Support for the Nordic Model

It is no secret that we have been trying for over a decade to get support for decriminalisation of sex work onto the agenda, without much success. In fact, we've been trying since 2010, when Women's Conference voted to support the Nordic Model.

That hasn't stopped us, it has only made us more determined. This year, at women's conference, we finally got the support we needed, perhaps not going as far as decriminalisation, but at least starting down the road. Our first step was to ask Women's Conference to end support for the Nordic Model.

The Nordic model, sometimes called the 'End Demand' approach, is a legal model based on decriminalising the selling of sexual services while introducing a 'sex buyers law' criminalising those who purchase those services. Sex workers organisations say that the Nordic model makes sex work more dangerous as sex workers take more risks with their own health and safety to protect buyers, their clients, from police detection. In effect, it means that they work 'underground'.

Jackie Lewis, a member of the LGBT+ National Committee, made an impassioned speech to move the motion at the 2022 National Women's Conference. Jackie made the point that by supporting the Nordic Model, UNISON is working against other trade unionists. A significant number of sex workers are members of the GMB, and the GMB opposes legislation which criminalises the purchase of sex, along with ASLEF, UCU, the BFAWU and RMT.

The Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women opposes 'sex buyer' laws. In 2011, it published

a report on the impact of anti-trafficking initiatives that use an 'end demand' approach, including the criminalisation of clients.

The report states that such approaches cause serious harm to sex workers by putting their livelihoods at risk, increasing the stigma they face, and intensifying police power over them.

The 'End Demand' approach doesn't 'end demand', and it doesn't stop women doing sex work. It's important to note that it's not only women who engage in sex work. The LGBT+ community is also affected. This is why it's been so important for us to fight for an end to UNISON's support for it.

There is no legal model anywhere in the world that has been shown to increase, or decrease, the number of people who sell sex. The evidence is that laws can only change whether people do sex work in dangerous conditions or in safer conditions. This statement was supported in a later speech by Sophie Robinson, another LGBT+ National Committee member.

There were many other emotive speakers in support. And of course, a couple of speakers speaking against using archaic arguments, that are manifestly false. In the end, excellent speakers for, and common sense prevailed, and Women's Conference supported the motion. We urge you to support the motion at NDC.

As a community we need to stand together to build the union that represents us, and a future we deserve. Thank you to everyone that supported our motions at both Women's Conference and at National Delegates Conference..

# No Solidarity without the T

Jack Anderson-Player

The recent government decision to exclude trans and non-binary people from the ban on Conversion Therapy (CT) is an appalling outcome and is something that we cannot stay quiet on.

It's another indication that our Tory government does not value equal treatment of human beings. And in 2022 the Tory government still think that it is ok that there are still groups of individuals who are seen as more valuable and worthier than others in terms of receiving basic human rights and equal treatment.

## Aside from abuse, what is conversion therapy?

Stonewall describes conversion therapy as 'any form of treatment or psychotherapy which aims to change a person's sexual orientation or to suppress a person's gender identity.' Conversion Therapy supports the idea that someone can be 'cured' of their identity and that anyone who fits outside of the gender binary is unwell.

Conversion therapy can appear in many forms and is often very subtle. It's not necessarily as physical as it may have been 50 years ago but that doesn't mean that it's any less traumatic for humans who are subjected to it. Stonewall reported in its LGBT Britain Report that one in five (20%) trans people in the UK have been pressured into accepting services which aim to suppress their gender identity.



## What can cis people do?

We need to stand in complete solidarity with our Trans friends. As with racism, it is not enough to simply not be a transphobe. We all have to be ANTI-TRANSPHOBIC.

It is of course true that as individual groups or L, G, B, T and PLUS – we all face separate challenges. My experience as a gay man is not at all in way the same as the experiences of someone who is asexual, transgender, intersex, a lesbian, non-binary or any other sexual orientation or gender identity that our LGBT+ group represents. This is the kind of dead-end thinking that trans-exclusionary groups (we all know who) use to rationalise their way of thinking.

The only way for this to happen is if we all remember that although our issues cannot be grouped for simplicity, we have a powerful voice as one LGBT+ community. The only way that the cage will get rattled is when we remember that the only reason we've got as far as



we have is because we know how to come together and support. Because when we've had enough of something, we've had enough.

Transgender rights have come a long way in the last 50 years in the UK but the recent government decision on conversion therapy banning is not helping the struggle for equality. UK law consistently shows an extremely narrow understanding of transgender issues in society and as a minority group (trans people represent less than 1% of the population), we have to fight alongside them to ensure that laws in the UK and abroad afford them the same basic rights that we all are entitled to.

# Journey to joining a Union

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Pk Kulasegram – Equality and Diversity Inclusion Manager for the School of Geography, University of Oxford and UNISON LGBT+ activist

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**It shouldn't seem like a tough sell. Make your voice heard, better pay and better conditions – you'd think it's an opportunity anyone would jump at and although that's exactly what strong unions offer.**

As a young person, I couldn't see that. When it came to unions, the younger Pk couldn't see the point. In New Zealand union members had contracts that seemed more restrictive and less appealing than the contracts offered to non-union members. Of course, what I couldn't see then was that although my leave and pay seemed better, my employment was significantly more precarious. All I cared about was being able to leave when I wanted, to be able to pay rent and afford groceries. In short, I couldn't see the value in a union.

Moving to the UK, I still couldn't see the value in a union. I didn't know if it was like in New Zealand and I'd have to move to some centralised contract, if being in a union would do anything other than restrict my freedom. It's ironic that I was already engaging with activism outside of unions, that when Americans were calling for various workers to unionise I was seconding the opinion but could not see the value of such an endeavour in my own life. I had undiagnosed ADHD and borderline personality disorder, my relationship with money meant that I was almost always running out of it. I allowed myself a few comforts, and if I had to choose between Netflix and union membership, that younger version of myself was going to pick Netflix. After all, employment

law in the UK was decent, my employers were supportive, what more could I want?

When any coverage of unions popped up, the faces I saw were overwhelmingly white, generally cis, and able bodied. I looked at my options for joining unions, I couldn't find inspiration or hope or even welcome. So why bother?

Then the 2019 election happened and suddenly I was presented with the harsh and unpleasant reality of a Tory majority and a country barrelling towards a hard Brexit. As many left wing people on social media quipped, "now is a great time to join a union." And that's what I did.

I had a look through the joining materials, the benefits and getting more involved. Everything seemed overwhelming, convoluted and inaccessible. The structures made no sense, I had no idea what the inner workings were. Not to mention terminology that seemed outdated or felt wrong.

How was I supposed to get more involved if it felt like our values simply didn't align? If I was so overwhelmed by just thinking about getting involved that I could barely function, exactly what did I think I could achieve? Add the fact that I have multiple disabilities and find dealing with people incredibly stressful, how was I supposed to do everything a union rep was supposed to do?

It was fear that made me join a union. It was that same fear and inability to truly see the value of trade unions that stopped me getting active. I was terrified of being the only person of colour in the room, or the only trans person or the only disabled person. I was tired of always being the only one in whatever circumstance I was in, and nothing I'd seen indicated that UNISON would be any different. So how did I get active?

Honestly, it was an impulse decision and mostly because I wanted to change the things that didn't seem like they were working. Everything was online, which made it accessible and the more involved I got the more I started to understand how much unions actually did and could do.

The more I began to understand UNISON, the more invested I became in being an activist. A union's strength is not in simply pointing out what isn't working – a simple 'we aren't' isn't going to win people's hearts.

The value of a union is in providing an alternative that genuinely excites people. Unions have a chance to unite people, to be bold and to do exactly what unions have always done – push for a future that is beyond current imagination. That is the kind of inspiration that gave us weekends and safer working environments all those years ago.

# 2022 year of disabled workers



## 2022 Year of the Disabled Worker

Louise Ashworth

### **UNISON has declared 2022, The Year of the Disabled Worker.**

One in five people are disabled so it stands to reason, that a substantial number of our LGBT+ members will be disabled. This is why The Year of the Disabled Worker is so important for the LGBT+ self organised group. Over the 12 months, UNISON is aiming to raise awareness of the social model of disability, reasonable

adjustments, the disability pay gap, disability employment gap and lots more. We are urging branches to work with Employers to negotiate disability inclusive policies and hold events and campaigns about disability equality in the workplace and rights for disabled people.

Being disabled and LGBT+ can be challenging. Disabled LGBT+ people can feel isolated due to

lack of inclusivity, accessibility and limited understanding of disability. During COVID-19 lockdowns, LGBT+ people reported a higher degree of isolation with many working from home, not having suitable equipment to be able to do their job and being unable to access LGBT+ safe spaces and venues. For disabled LGBT+ people, this was nothing new. Whilst, pre-pandemic, disabled



people had been asking for homeworking to be considered as a reasonable adjustment, this was often refused. Requests for reasonable adjustments so that a disabled worker has the appropriate equipment for them to do their job, often denied or delayed. Some LGBT+ venues, have never been available to disabled people due to lack of accessibility. Participation in meetings and events such as Pride have often proved difficult due to not being accessible.

Working from home also brought with it additional costs. Disabled people tend to be paid less than non-disabled people and many of us have additional disability related financial outgoings so disability poverty is a real concern. In 2021, the disability pay gap was 16.5% meaning that Disabled people were working from the 8th of November to the end of the year for nothing. The disability employment gap is 28% which means that there are a lot of us who find it difficult to access and retain employment. Disabled LGBT+ people experience a lack of reasonable adjustments, disability discrimination in the workplace and stigma.

For disabled LGBT+ people, with non-apparent health conditions and impairments, we have to come out twice – as

LGBT+ and also as disabled. Some LGBT+ people may not realise that they are covered by the disability provisions of the Equality Act. 2010. The Equality Act defines disability as a physical or mental impairment or condition that has lasted or is likely to last for 12 months or more and which has a substantial impact on daily activities including work related activities. People who are living with HIV, multiple sclerosis or who have had a diagnosis of cancer are automatically included within the definition of disability without having to show that their condition is long term or has a substantial impact on daily activities. The impact of menopause symptoms has been deemed to be a disability in some circumstances. And as we know, Long Covid may constitute a disability if it passes the long term and substantial impact tests.

UNISON Disabled Members organise around the social model of disability which means that. a person is disabled by barriers in society, environment and attitudes not by their impairment or condition. Getting employers to adopt the social model of disability means that we can be more inclusive of disabled people. In the past two years, disabled people have been subjected to pathologisation and medicalisation – being labelled clinically

vulnerable and extremely clinically vulnerable which for the purpose of shielding, this was important but this disempowering language spilled over into the workplace with disabled workers being forced to go on furlough and having to undergo risk assessments. There was a blurring of what was a workplace adjustment for everyone and what should have been a reasonable adjustment for disabled workers. Some disabled people felt that they were expendable with access to ventilators being determined on where someone was on a scale of clinical vulnerability and there were reports of disabled people and older people being asked to sign do not resuscitate directives.

UNISON estimates that we have about 200,000 disabled members, many of whom are activists both within disabled members and LGBT+ self organisation. Disability rights are everyone's responsibility and inclusive and accessible workplaces and trade union activism benefits us all.

Let us know what you will be doing during the Year of the Disabled Worker by e-mailing [out@unison.co.uk](mailto:out@unison.co.uk)

Resources can be found at <https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/fairness-equality/disabled-members/year-of-disabled-workers-2022>



# Black LGBT+ Members

Manish Maisuria

**The past two years have been of significant impact to humanity the world over, but in terms of LGBT+, our issues have often been overshadowed by solutions for the common good, which end up diluting the focus further especially when seen through a Black LGBT+ lens.** The pandemic had its effects on all people across all communities, but I found that in trying to cater for staff returning to work in a different normality, issues LGBT+ staff may face weren't as prevalent and were therefore overlooked. Working in a Higher Education environment as a Manager there was a little more work to do, in trying to ensure LGBT+ issues were also tackled and Black LGBT+ voices were also heard.

The effect of the pandemic was equally impacted by widely reported crimes against Black communities, and certainly part of this impact included paying homage to the important philosophy and endeavours of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which we strive to embody and apply in our own and work environments. Moreover, the effect of Covid on Black LGBT+ staff presented issues of isolation, hardships around (single) parenting and being told they were part of a vulnerable group medically, therefore extra care needed to be taken.

As Chair of my University Staff BAME and LGBT+ Fora, I was fortunate to be able to contribute to University discussions to take appropriate action in supporting both communities, looking at issues from an intersectional perspective.

One solution was to introduce Agile Working where staff could take a hybrid approach to work,



mixing home and on-site working as long as the (IT) infrastructure and nature of the work allowed. This proved useful in combatting feelings of isolation, but I found it wasn't always universally beneficial. Auxiliary staff often don't have access to computers, with some not even having work email addresses. However more interestingly, I found that the plight of LGBT+ staff was not handled with as much urgency, leading me to believe there was a perception that our LGBT+ community didn't need as much support in this (or perhaps any) scenario, maybe because there wasn't as much noise made from this section of the community at large. Inevitably this further diluted Black LGBT+ issues as they were often lumped into efforts around our response to the BLM initiative.

It is important to remember, especially during this time, that we are, and remain one community, and are here for each other – albeit remotely. In getting the workplace to talk about LGBT+ and Race in pursuing equality

endeavours, we must be inclusive and mindful of our varying sub-groups. Personal development can be argued to be improved by remaining both outward-facing and inward-looking, so why should this philosophy not be extended to the wider workplace? This is certainly something I try and exercise in my own endeavours at work, and it has expounded invaluable stories and lived experiences, which are too important to be undermined by the bigger picture.

## UK Black Pride

Is Europe's largest celebration for African, Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American and Caribbean-heritage LGBTQI+ people. This year's event takes place on 14 August 2022 – and as we go to print the venue is still to be announced.

UNISON traditionally has a recruitment and information stall at UK Black Pride, so if you are attending come along and say hello. <https://www.ukblackpride.org.uk/2022>

# Bi+ in UNISON

**It is clear in recent times that some organisations have a very curtailed definition of what bisexual means.** The UNISON LGBT+ Self Organised Group (SOG) debated motions to add a plus to our name at our 2018 conference. The rule change went to National Delegate Conference in June 2019 and was carried unanimously. So LGBT+ was born demonstrating our inclusivity without excluding any identity that would not be included by adding more letters.

Once the plus had been added to the SOG's name, the Bi Caucus considered whether the term Bi was inclusive enough, and whether adding our own plus would signpost our members towards our inclusivity. It was generally agreed that adding a plus would definitely be positive.

In UNISON the term 'Bi+' relates to the umbrella definition of bisexuality. We include all people who are attracted to more than one gender. This includes people who are pansexual, omnisexual, bi romantic, questioning and/or bi-curious to name a few.

The bi+ umbrella is inclusive of trans and non-binary people.

This is not to say that we haven't always welcomed participation, but the plus was a way of making sure our community know we are welcoming.

This article explores some of our members' experiences of the addition of the '+'.  
**(Gary/Sally)**



“As someone who describes themselves as gender fluid, I identify with both the traditional male and female gender. I believe my sexuality is Bi+ because if someone is attracted to me as a person they would be attracted to both male and female genders not just a single option. My personal attraction includes those who identify as females and those who identify as non-binary so I am also not attracted just to one gender. I would be disrespecting those who I am attracted to who do not identify as female if I suggested I identified as heterosexual. It is important we recognise that gender does not just reflect the two traditional options. I belong to the '+' in Bi and it's important for me to be recognised as such.”  
**(Gary/Sally)**

“I was delighted and relieved when the + was added. I am a panromantic asexual and proud to call myself both panromantic and as asexual. Before the addition of the + I knew i belonged in the Bi Caucus as I am attracted to people irrespective of gender but I didn't feel I had a 'home' for my asexuality. I know that sounds odd but I did need that place where my asexuality sits and the + covers that. UNISON has always made me feel that I belong but know I feel I belong more and that my uniqueness is recognised.”  
**(Penny)**

**The Bi+ Caucus would welcome your contributions of how you identify for future editions. Sharing experiences increases our visibility, and you are all part of our '+'.  
**(Penny)****

# 2022 UNISON LGBT+ Conference

Our conference this year will take place between 18 – 20 November in Edinburgh, the deadline to register delegates is 23 September. Further details are on the UNISON website <https://www.unison.org.uk/events>.

All branches are encouraged to register delegates to attend what is one of the largest LGBT+ conferences in the world.

During conference, we hold elections for delegates to 2023 national delegate conference, each of the national service group conferences, the UNISON delegation to the TUC LGBT+ conference and general seats on 2023 LGBT+ conference standing orders committee. If you are interested in any of these roles, you'll need to get yourself nominated by your Branch or Regional LGBT+ group.

If you have any questions about UNISON's LGBT+ conference or the elections held during conference, please contact us at [out@unison.co.uk](mailto:out@unison.co.uk)

## Conference deadlines

### 29 July (noon)

Deadline to submit motions

### 19 August

Preliminary agenda published

### 23 September (noon)

Deadline to submit motions

### 23 September

Deadline to register delegates

### 23 September

Deadline for nominations

### 21 October

Final agenda published

## Network meetings

Our bi+, Black, disabled and trans networks (caucuses) can submit motions to our conference. To allow this to happen we have arranged the following meetings:

**Bi+ network meeting** – 15 July 2022 (10.30am – 1pm)

**Trans network meeting** – 15 July 2022 (2 – 4.30pm)

**Disabled LGBT+ members meeting** 15 September (1.30 – 4.00pm)

**Black LGBT+ members meeting** 17 September (11am – 2pm)

Our network meetings are open to anyone who identifies as either bi+, trans, disabled LGBT+ and Black LGBT+. You do not need to be out in your branch to attend, and travel is met by UNISON nationally.

For further information and registration forms for each of these meetings, please contact us [out@unison.co.uk](mailto:out@unison.co.uk)



## Young members LGBT+ network

Young members are the future of our union and we need to put more work into supporting and fostering activism among our young LGBT+ members. The national LGBT+ committee has formulated young LGBT+ members' campaign to do just that. One way we are going to do this is by establishing a young LGBT+ network. This way, young LGBT+ workers will have direct engagement with the national LGBT+ committee and is a stepping stone to further activism within UNISON's LGBT+ structures.

Our inaugural meeting of the network will take place in late summer as a hybrid meeting. For more information about the network or if you want to be involved, please contact [out@unison.co.uk](mailto:out@unison.co.uk).

Whilst we know that many of our readers do not identify as young members, (aged 27 or under) we would ask that you bring this meeting to the attention of your branch and ask them to include the information in their next newsletter!



## National LGBT+ Committee supports Ukraine

The national LGBT+ committee members recently met with Ukrainian people at the ILGA World conference and discussed how our committee could best support Ukrainians during this time. We urge everyone to support the ILGA Europe supported initiatives that support Ukraine. For more details, please see: <https://www.ilga-europe.org/tags/ukraine>



## Carola Towle – The end of an era

**Since 1990, Carola has worked for NALGO and into UNISON, leading the unions fight for LGBT+ equality until June 2019 when she became head of UNISON's Equality Unit.**

But Carola was an activist long before joining UNISON and recalls “We had fought the introduction of Thatcher’s Section 28 – the ban on the ‘promotion of homosexuality’ by local authorities. It reinforced the dangerous myth that lesbians and gay men were a threat to children. But despite our campaigning, Section 28 came into force in 1988, with a chilling effect on inclusive education, community funding and same-sex parenting. My first child was born early in 1989 and I feared for our family.”

When Carola joined NALGO in 1990, workers could be sacked just for being gay and sexual orientation was not established as a legitimate workplace issue. Lesbians and Gay men had been organising in NALGO since the mid 1970’s, had won recognition within the union, and were pushing for recognition with employers, public service providers and in law.

Carola reflects that over the last three decades, there have



been many battles, a few losses, which we still mourn, but there has been real change.

When asked what she was most proud of, Carola replied “An impossible question, with so many bargaining, campaign and organising achievements,” she says. “So perhaps the answer is how we have worked”.

“Too many lesbian and gay initiatives – then and, to some extent, still now – were based on the interests of the most privileged. Usually white, professional gay men. Never in our organising. We have always worked to be properly representative and to give those facing the greatest inequalities a voice.

“This is what gives our equality bargaining its authority. And while there is no doubt that far too many LGBT+ people still face discrimination at work, when accessing services and even

when walking down the road, our rights are now established.”

Recognising UNISON’s diversity was behind the move from a lesbian and gay group to a LGBT group which finally became a reality in June 2005. And 14 years later, the plus (+) was added, showing that LGBT+ group was inclusive to everyone within the diverse UNISON LGBT+ community.

With over 30 years working on LGBT+ equality, Carola concludes that “Many headline demands have been met, but old demands are replaced with new one. But as with other inequalities, LGBT+ discrimination is persistent and pervasive. We face new threats from a hostile government with a comfortable majority and an accompanying increase in hate. One example – trans rights are still too often framed as a matter of personal conscience. Despite legal protection going back to 1999, trans workers still face the highest levels of discrimination.”

**Carola, we’d like to thank you for your tireless work on LGBT+ equality throughout your working life, and we wish you a long, happy and rainbow coloured retirement.**