

**2023 National Young Members' Conference  
Decisions**

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## 2023 National Young Members' Conference Decisions

### Motions

#### 1. Promoting the participation of young women members in the union

**Carried**

Conference, UNISON has more than 1.3 million members and activists of which more than 70% are women. This means that there are over 9 hundred thousand women members scattered across the twelve regions and over 1000 branches. We know we have around 85 thousand young members, so if we use the same percentage of 70% for women this means that we have around 60 thousand young women in UNISON.

At the National Young Members' Forum (NYMF)'s first conference in 2021, there were multiple motions calling on UNISON to do more to support and encourage young members into other avenues of activism within UNISON when they "age out" of the NYMF.

In 2021, UNISON launched a review of low paid women's participation aimed at creating an inclusive space for low paid women and increasing their participation within the union.

Conference notes that a survey of UNISON young members in November 2020 found that young women members are anxious about taking part in UNISON activities for the first time.

Conference we know that a percentage of young members will have multiple identities that span our self-organising spaces. To include young members and encourage greater participation in our union we need to be working together across the self-organised groups (SOGS).

To ensure we have more women activists and to engage women who are low paid workers we must remove all barriers that prevents them from participating in the union. UNISON will benefit and so will the women members. This is fundamental to the development of our women members.

If we can bring more young members into the women's and other SOGs, we can encourage and support them to continue their activism journey in UNISON. This can only be good for membership and activist development.

Conference calls on the National Young Members' Forum to work with the National Women's Committee to:

1. Consider setting up a network for young women members.
2. Encourage young women members to participate in the branch/regional women's committee.
3. Work with the NYMF to develop a strategy to increase the numbers of young women members participating in the women's SOG.
4. Engage with branch and regional women SOGs to identify barriers for young women members in getting more active in UNISON, and to highlight positive measures and success stories in addressing these barriers.

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5. Work with the other SOGs, young members' forum and other appropriate parts of the union to explore alternative ways of meeting that take into account the needs of all young members, including meeting venues, to increase the participation of all young women members in our union.
6. Encourage regional and branch groups to hold joint events with regional young members' forums wherever possible.
7. Encourage regions and branches to promote the new young members age limit of 30.

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### 2. Young Black Members and Mental Health

**Carried**

The National Health Service (NHS) reported that 3.25 million individuals had contact with mental health services during 2021/22 which is approximately 5.8 percent of the population. The Mental Health Foundation tells us that 50% of mental health problems are established by age 14 and 75% by age 24, yet many young people have not had appropriate interventions.

Statistics also tell us that mental health problems are higher for many Black communities. Black communities experience complex factors that adversely affect their mental health including social and economic inequalities, racism and discrimination, mental health stigma, and difficulties accessing appropriate support and interventions.

In the midst of the cost of living crisis, when we know that young Black workers are disproportionately represented in insecure and low-paid employment, and we know that rates of depression and anxiety are rising, poor mental health has an impact on many of our young Black members.

We therefore call on the Young Members Forum to work with the National Black Members' Committee to:

- 1 Signpost young Black workers to current support and mental health services that are available;
- 2 Highlight constructive steps employers can take to support staff with mental health issues;
- 3 Campaign against the stigma surrounding mental health.

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### 3. Young members and retired members – A learning and campaigning opportunity

**Carried**

Although we may be at different ends of our working life, young members in UNISON have a lot in common with retired members.

For example

- Both are protected against age discrimination by the Equality Act 2010
- Both can suffer from age discrimination
- Our views are often ignored by society
- Our competency is not trusted despite our abilities
- Loneliness and mental health issues can become exacerbated
- We both face challenges to accessing housing
- There can be difficulties in accessing local services
- Poverty can be an issue because of poor pay rises / poor pension increases

Conference notes that UNISON's retired members have a great deal of knowledge and life experience.

For example

- UNISON processes
- Recruitment and organising
- Connections to community groups and trade councils
- Campaigning skills

Conference also notes that there are many UNISON retired members that could benefit from the knowledge of UNISON young members.

This is knowledge exchange that UNISON could benefit from but is currently failing to do so.

Conference calls upon the National Young Members Forum to contact the National Retired Members Forum to discuss

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1. The possibility of a mentoring scheme where retired members support young members when they first become activists.
2. How joint working between regional and national, young and retired members forums could be of mutual benefit.
3. To explore the possibility of joint campaigning to raise awareness of age discrimination.

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### 4. Peer mentoring for young LGBT+ members

**Carried**

Conference commends the campaign by the national Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender plus (LGBT+) members committee on engaging young LGBT+ members. We have now over 100 members part of this network and we are growing!

As part of this campaign, the national LGBT+ committee has established a mentoring programme, where members of the national LGBT+ committee mentor members of the young LGBT+ network. This is going well and is invaluable to supporting young LGBT+ members. It is helping us to develop experience and understanding of UNISON structures, which can be complicated.

However, peer mentoring would also help to empower us and to build up confidence.

Why is this needed?

Young LGBT+ members in UNISON are underrepresented. Work has already been done with the setting up of a WhatsApp group for young LGBT+ members and regular Zoom meetings. Peer-to-peer mentoring would establish better communication of the network and help to further develop activists and build their confidence. It would also encourage young LGBT+ members to put themselves forward for positions at branch, regional or even national level.

Conference, while knowledge imparted from the mentor in the current mentoring programme is valuable, it does not always correlate with the lived experience of young LGBT+ members. Young members are more likely to identify with those around their age and feel comfortable discussing ideas within their own age group.

Peer mentoring would also allow the young LGBT+ member network to communicate better with each other. As the network members are from all around the United Kingdom (UK), apart from the WhatsApp groups and the caucus meetings at conference, the network members do not have much interaction with each other. This would foster better working relationships within the network so it can grow and work more cohesively.

We call on the national young members forum to work with the National LGBT+ committee to:

1. Continue the work of the national young LGBT+ members network and promote it among UNISON's young members
2. Consider different ways to develop peer to peer mentoring within the young LGBT+ member network
3. Work with UNISON College to develop peer to peer training for those interested
4. Develop resources such as a webinar and leaflets to promote peer to peer mentoring and any successes.

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### 5. Maternity Pay

**Carried**

A survey conducted this year by Censuswide found that young people were considering delaying or deciding not to have children. More than half cited financial reasons as the number one reason for this.

Conference notes that statutory maternity leave in the United Kingdom is issued for up to 52 weeks. Local Government Employees that have at least one year's continuous local government service at the 11th week before the expected week of childbirth, and returns to work for a period of three months after maternity leave, will be entitled to Statutory Maternity Pay and occupational maternity pay as follows:

6 weeks at 90% of full pay, 12 weeks at 50% pay plus Statutory Maternity Pay and 21 weeks on statutory provision.

With the cost-of-living crisis and ongoing inflation it is clear to see that the current maternity pay provision does not sufficiently cover everyday costs.

This can have a toll on the financial independence of women who will inevitably find themselves having to rely on partners, families, or personal savings to get by. This impacts household finance and can lead to an outdated typically male 'breadwinner' concept re-emerging in dual income households. This can add to the pressure of having a new baby and put strains on relationships and wellbeing within families. Furthermore, pregnancy serves as a risk factor for domestic violence and financial disempowerment can leave women trapped in desperate situations.

Conference welcomes the National Joint Council Joint Trade Union side calling for better maternity pay conditions for Local Government Employees.

Conference notes that the conditions offered within the National Health Service include:

- 8 weeks' full pay, less any Statutory Maternity Pay or Maternity Allowance
- 18 weeks' half pay plus any Statutory Maternity Pay or Maternity allowance (providing the total does not exceed full pay)
- 13 weeks' Statutory Maternity Pay) or Maternity allowance
- 13 weeks' unpaid leave.

Conference believes that maternity pay conditions being in line across public sector organisations will have a significantly positive impact on women, parents and wider society.

We are calling on the National Young Members Forum to

- Consider sending a motion to the Local Government Service Group Conference calling on it to produce a report which investigates maternity pay disparity between Local Government employers and other public sector

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organisations as well as the impact of current maternity pay on the wellbeing of parents

- Prioritise a maternity pay campaign through which we ensure that all young members are aware of the maternity and paternity pay, as well as shared parental leave conditions and provide resources to Young Member Officers so that they can campaign for better maternity/paternity pay locally.

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### 6. Building on the legacy of the Year of Black workers

**Carried as Amended: 6.1**

Conference notes that 2023 was designated UNISON's year of Black workers, with the aim of 'establishing legacy to generate change'.

Conference welcomes all the work that has been put into marking the year of Black workers, but notes that there is still a long way to go, particularly in regards to young Black members in UNISON.

Conference believes that it is essential that the voices of young Black workers are heard at all levels of UNISON, representing their issues and concerns.

Conference notes that young Black workers are still more likely to be in insecure and precarious work, are still more likely to be low paid, and are less likely to take up apprenticeships and other training and work schemes. Furthermore, despite historically low level of unemployment for young workers, young Black workers are more likely to be un- or under-employed.

Young Black members are under-represented as members and activists in UNISON and conference believes that following the year of Black workers it is important to address this and find solutions.

Furthermore, following the rule change increasing the age limit for young members, conference believes this is an opportunity to take positive action to recruit more young Black workers to the union and encourage young Black members to become more active in UNISON.

Conference asks the National Young Members Forum to:

1. Review the actions taken as a result of the motion to 2022 young members conference, and continue work on developing a mentoring and buddying scheme as agreed at Young Members Conference 2022;
2. Survey young Black members to identify any barriers to joining or becoming active in UNISON;
3. Review guidance on mentoring and buddying and consider updating if this is appropriate;
4. Work with the National Black Members Committee to establish a Young Black Members Network;
5. Continue to promote UNISON's resources for young Black members including the Young Black Members video, Defining Black and the Young Black Members award;
6. Consider producing resources aimed at encouraging young Black members to join UNISON and become active in the union;

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7. Organise intergenerational event to bring young and old experienced members together to ensure the legacy of YOBW2023 continues to be secured.
8. Consider making further recommendations, such as reserved seats at Young Members conference for Black members.

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### 7. Young Member Focused Training on Strikes and Ballots

Carried

In October 2022 Christina McAnea warned that UNISON-led strikes in 2023 could represent the largest strike by NHS workers since the early 1980s. More recently, UNISON posted a news update on the 5th of July this year titled “[the] Government should commit to NHS pay talks now to avoid possible strikes next year.” Many Young Members (YMs) were balloted within their workplace branches for the first time in their lives.

It is our opinion that a level of knowledge is often assumed within branches about the mechanisms and results of balloting and strike action. Some YMs have pointed to a lack of available and promoted information about these topics as part of the reason behind abstaining in strike ballots. This will, in our view, inevitably affect the turn-out for these votes, and potentially prevent thresholds being met either way.

Some YMs have also expressed concern about a lack of understanding about employment rights while taking strike action. Particular areas of concern were highlighted around how their jobs and pay would be protected during and after any participation in a strike.

Both of these factors combined may have led some YMs to feel unable to vote in these ballots, in part due to a lack of available information which was accessible to them and specific to their concerns. YMs want to make informed choices when they receive these ballots, knowing their rights and expectations if action is passed.

With this in mind, and the potential for further strikes in the future, we propose that the National Young Members Forum should resolve to:

1. Liaise with Learning & Organising to organise workshops for YMs with the purpose of providing knowledge about: how strike action is decided upon and balloted for; how structures within UNISON operate and coordinate more generally, and what UNISON members’ legal rights are whilst taking part in strike action.
2. Liaise with Learning & Organising to develop consistently available learning materials on the topics mentioned above.
3. Promote YMs’ and Regional Young Member’s Forums involvement in local branches and committees’ future balloting campaigns, to encourage appropriate information to be distributed with YMs in mind during these times.
4. Run an engagement campaign with potential YMs, who may or may not currently be UNISON members, to inform them of the topics mentioned above.
5. Survey YMs on:

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- The level of knowledge they feel they have on the topics mentioned above.
- The support they felt they received from their local branch and regional committees whilst the most recent balloting processes and strikes were ongoing.
- How this may be improved, if required, in the future.

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### EM1. Ceasefire now – justice for Palestine

Carried

The National Young members conference notes:

1. The horrific escalation of violence since 7 October in which 1400 Israelis and more than 10,000 Palestinians have been killed so far (as of 7 November). Over 4,000 of the Palestinians who have been killed were children. The number of Palestinians killed is rising rapidly every day.
2. Israel has placed the Gaza Strip under a complete siege cutting off supplies of water, food, fuel, and medicine. Israeli airstrikes continue to target civilian infrastructure – including roads, hospitals, homes, and schools.
3. Palestinians in the occupied West Bank face a lockdown and a growing number have been imprisoned or killed. Whole Palestinian communities have been driven from their homes by armed settlers with support from the Israeli military.
4. Numerous scholars and legal experts have warned of the risk of genocide taking place.
5. This latest onslaught follows decades of violations of international law which meets the legal definition of apartheid.
6. The uncritical support given by the British government and largest opposition party to Israel's attacks and siege on Gaza.
7. That many young trade unionists, including UNISON members, have joined demonstrations to support calls for an immediate ceasefire, and that this is a central issue for young trade unionists, especially given the high numbers of young people and children affected by the attack on Gaza.
8. UNISON's continuing support for the Palestinian people's struggle for independence, territorial integrity and national unity, and our commitment to a strategy of targeted campaigns for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions, as most recently reaffirmed through motion 72 'We need to talk about Palestine' at National Delegate Conference 2023.

This conference believes:

1. International law makes clear that the deliberate killing of civilians, collective punishment and hostage-taking are war crimes. Apartheid, the forcible transfer of populations, and genocide are crimes against humanity. Such crimes are unacceptable no matter who perpetrates them.
2. An immediate ceasefire is the only way to stop further deterioration of the humanitarian situation. As charities including Christian Aid, Oxfam and Save the Children have said: a ceasefire 'remains our only option to avert further loss of civilian life and humanitarian catastrophe.'

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3. While calling for an immediate end to all violence we recognise that for there to be lasting peace the root causes of conflict need to be addressed. Israel's longstanding violations of human rights and international law must end.

This conference asks the National Young Members Forum to:

1. encourage UNISON young members to urge the British government and members of parliament to call for an immediate ceasefire.
2. Work with the NEC to support UNISON's involvement in boycott, divestment and sanctions campaigns, including promoting UNISON's guide 'Palestine: is your pension invested in the occupation' and the guide for UNISON activists 'Talking about Palestinian rights'
3. Publicise UNISON's affiliation with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) to regional young member forums and encourage young members in UNISON to participate in PSC campaigns and demonstrations.