

ANNUAL REPORT

The work of
the UNISON NI
Regional
Committee,
2019-2020



Who's Who on the Regional Committee in 2019/2020

Joint Regional Convenors

		Meetings
Gabrielle Carton	Classroom Assistant, Ardnashee School & College, Derry	4
Denis Keatings*	Customer Care Officer, Mater Hospital, Belfast	3

Committee Members

Flora Alfante	Nursing Auxiliary, Craigavon Area Hospital	2
Paul Allen	Disability Committee	2
Aine Brennan	Medical Secretary, Mater Hospital, Belfast	3
Roisin Byrne	PCSS Domestic, Royal Hospitals, Belfast	1
Caroline Campbell	Domestic Assistant, Causeway Hospital, Coleraine	3
Jean Getty	Homecare Worker, Community Services, Magherafelt	4
Irene Graham	Nursery Assistant, Oldpark Nursery School, Belfast	0
Stephanie Greenwood	Higher Clerical Officer, Antrim Area Hospital	4
Kim Hall	Domestic Assistant, Causeway Hospital, Coleraine	4
Daphne Harper	Cleaner/Supervisor, Craigavon Senior High School	0
Kevin Hillick	Caretaker, Poleglass Youth Club, Belfast	3
Fiona Kelly	Home Care Worker, Community Services, Magherafelt	4
James Large	Pharmacy Technician, Ulster Hospital, Belfast	4
Joseph Lynch	Day Care Worker, Everton Centre, Belfast	3
Anne-Jane McBrien	Staff Nurse, South West Acute Hospital, Enniskillen	1
Karen McCallum	Nursing Auxiliary, Lurgan Hospital	3
Niall McCarroll	Deputy Manager, First Housing, L/Derry	2
Conor McCarthy	Radiographers Helpers, Royal Hospitals, Belfast	4
Brenda McColgan	Care Assistant, Greenfield Residential Home, Strabane	3
Martin McConnellogue	Manager, First Housing, Jefferson Court, Derry	2
Caroline McDaid	Classroom Assistant, Knockavoe School, Derry	0
Caroline McDermott	Teaching Assistant, Oakgrove Integrated College, Derry	4
Lorna McLarnon	Domestic Assistant, Musgrave Park Hospital, Belfast	0
Anne McVicker	Director, Women's Resource Development Agency, Belfast	2
Catherine McKenna	Catering Assistant/Bus Escort - Holy Child Primary School, Belfast	4
Maura McKenna	Staff Side Officer	4
Roisin McKinley	Cook, Youth Justice Agency, Bangor	1
Noel Muldoon	Retired Members Forum	4
Alan Philson	Nursing Assistant, Waterside Hospital, Derry	4
Samantha Rutherford	Community Care Worker, SEHSCT, Newtownards	1
Amanda Sweetlove	Emergency Medical Technician, Antrim Ambulance Station	1
Anne Taggart	Catering Assistant, Holy Child Primary School, Belfast	4
Marjorie Trimble	Disability Committee	4
Jill Weir	Ward Clerk, South West Acute Hospital, Enniskillen	4
Deborah Yapicioz	Social Worker, St Luke's site, Armagh	3

NEC Members in Attendance

Margaret McKee	Catering Assistant, Royal Hospitals, Belfast	3
Alastair Long	Ambulance Personnel, Larne Ambulance Depot	4
Gillian Foley	Community Worker, Intensive Community Care, SEHSCT	4

* Denis died on 15th May 2020. Tributes from the Regional Secretary and General Secretary are included at the end of this report.

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Introduction

Our members have faced extraordinary change over the past year. Change marked by sadness and joy, historic industrial struggle, intensive collective bargaining, continuous political campaigning, smart organising, a growing membership, a pandemic, a lockdown and an amazing determination to get through it and now change the future. That is what makes UNISON strong.

We present this year's Annual Report while mourning the loss of our Joint Regional Convenor, Denis Keatings. Many tributes have been paid acknowledging Denis's outstanding contribution to our union. Our best tribute is a determination to achieve the goals set by our Regional Council, our branches and our members. This report tracks our progress to date.

We moved from last year's Regional Council almost immediately into unique industrial action across the health service in NI. That strike brought unprecedented public support for our members and increasing public anger at the absence of our Government.

As ever, support workers across our health and social services system took a leading role. It saw UNISON and the RCN working together to produce headline strike action from nurses. It played a key role in the return of devolved government. It achieved the restoration of parity. It has highlighted staffing levels and health resources. There is much more to achieve.

Hard on the heels of the strike came Covid-19. We mourn the loss of hundreds of local people, our members and their families among them. We offer our condolences. We pay tribute to our members for their extraordinary dedication and for risking their own health and safety to protect the rest of us. We acknowledge the public support, but we need more than applause.

We watched with disgust at the UK Prime Minister's 'photo op' applauding health workers when a few weeks previously he and

his Government had voted down a pay rise for health workers and cheered while doing so. UNISON has a mission to change that.



Joint Regional Convenor Denis Keatings at a Mater Hospital branch pay demo, 25th November 2019

As we write this year's report our members in education now become a new frontline facing the challenge of Covid. Our mission is to protect them, the children and young people and vital services.

At Council we are launching our new campaign demanding free school meals for all. We also long campaigned for smaller classrooms and better resources, particularly for children in the most deprived communities. Now is time to press for political support.

The pandemic has put a spotlight on what UNISON already knew - poverty and low income is the major contributor to the deaths from Covid-19. It has disproportionately impacted the lives of women, the BAME community, older people, those with a disability and the vulnerable young.

Society has woken up to the value of key workers – the lowest paid and least valued workers were the lifeline during lockdown. Food, shelter and enough money to live on became headlines.

The task now is for us to ensure that this is not forgotten. Instead, to achieve real change rather than a return to 'normal', UNISON has launched its 'NO GOING BACK TO NORMAL' campaign and this becomes a core framework for us in the coming years.

All the problems we highlighted last year are still with us. Jobs and public services have suffered as a consequence of political instability. Our members' rights are under threat from many directions. As a union we have risen to the challenge.

The UNISON team continues to campaign tirelessly. We have engaged with all political parties, the British and Irish Governments, and EU and US political representatives demanding protection for our members, public services and the Peace Process itself. In addition to the jobs and businesses destroyed by Covid-19, we still face the looming impact of Brexit.

In a union which thrives on the direct involvement of our members and on collectivity and solidarity, we have faced the challenge of regulations and restrictions, designed to protect, but which also make organising and participation much more difficult. We have met the challenge. From this report it is apparent that our branches and our staff team have found many new ways to engage directly with thousands of UNISON members and to maintain and develop the democratic life of the union.

We have been able to continue support for key campaigns on abortion rights, on domestic violence, on Black Lives Matter, on a Bill of Rights, on equality and human rights at home and abroad and to maintain our work on international solidarity.

Much of this work has been possible through the development of our new UNISON College online training programmes, interactive online sessions and webinars. We are proud to have sustained and developed our education programme throughout this critical time. None of this work would be possible without a dedicated UNISON staff team and elected representatives supporting each other.

Everyone has been under intense pressure throughout the year. New stewards and branch officials have joined the struggle. Others have retired or stepped down because of the increasing pressure of caring responsibilities. Some others are sadly no longer with us and will be remembered at Regional Council.



UNISON takes the health pay postcard campaign directly to Stormont

We also take this opportunity to pay tribute to our General Secretary, Dave Prentis, who has announced his retirement after a lifetime of dedication to the union. Dave has been a particular friend of UNISON NI and an ardent supporter of our work on Peace. He has recognised our contribution to new forms of organising, supported our policy challenges to government and he has been with us through every industrial struggle since the foundation of UNISON. We will say a special 'Thank You' at this year's Regional Council.

As we present our Annual Report, Regional Committee takes this opportunity to pay tribute to the hard work and dedication of our members, activists and staff throughout 2019/20, and we look forward to working together to advance our union agenda in the year to come.

Patricia McKeown, Regional Secretary

Gabrielle Carton, Joint Regional Convenor

UNISON Objectives and Plan

NI Regional Council

The NI Regional Council comprises delegates from branches, service groups and self-organised groups. It meets annually:

- to debate union policy;
- to measure our progress on the national and NI objectives; and
- to set out the forthcoming work programme on behalf of our members.

Throughout the year the decisions of the Regional Council are actioned by the Regional Committee, UNISON staff and branches. This

report to NI Regional Council is a record of the work of the Regional Committee and all lay structures since the last annual meeting of the Council in October 2019.

The Regional Committee takes this opportunity to thank all UNISON members, activists and staff for their role in making the past year such a success despite the many unprecedented challenges facing us over the period.

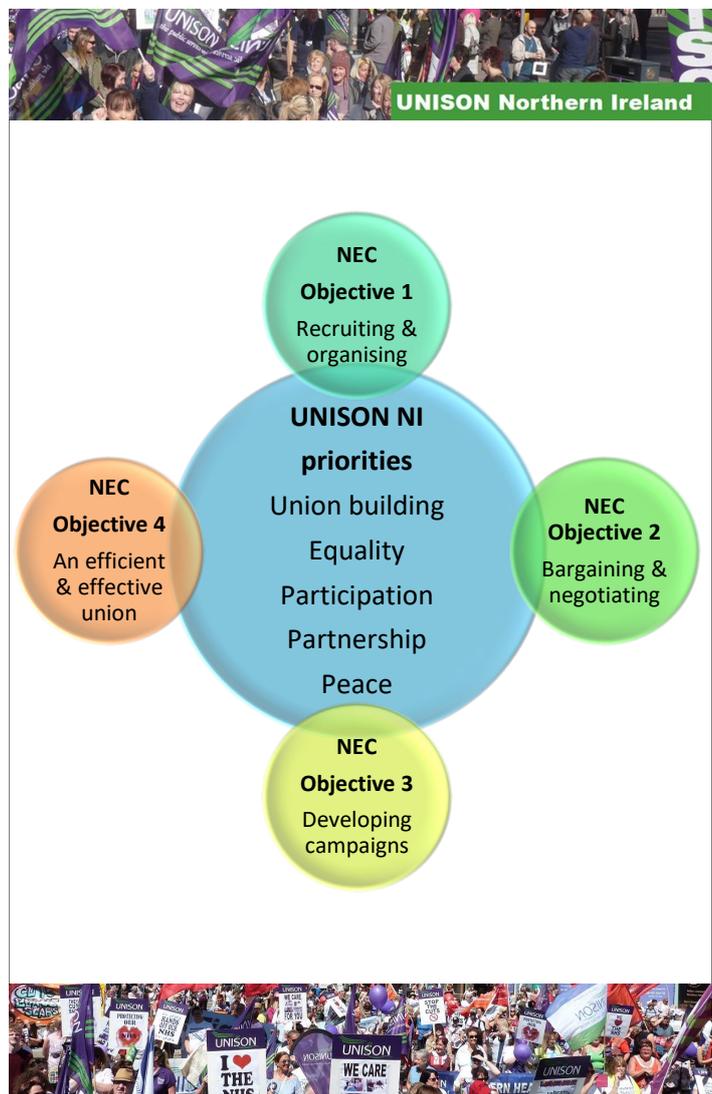
The UNISON NI Plan 2020

Each year the National Executive Council sets its objectives and priorities. We in turn add our own priorities which are set by Regional Council resolutions, our own knowledge of the political situation, and priorities identified by branches, the UNISON team of activists and staff working in partnership.

The NEC objectives remain fairly constant, but the priorities are revised each year. Our core priorities are protecting our public services and our members' jobs and growing the union.

For UNISON NI this means engaging with our members; strong bargaining with the employers; political campaigning, with equality and human rights at its core; and building the union through a strong organising programme.

The UNISON NI Plan was adapted in March 2020 to meet the organising, bargaining, campaigning and administrative challenges that have arisen as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.



Objective 1

Building our union

Recruiting, organising,
representing &
retaining members



Recruiting and organising

Our recruitment and organising achievements in 2019/20

Introduction: A key UNISON NI priority is to grow the union through a strong organising programme across core employers and in strategic growth areas, such as private sector social care. This priority derives from NEC Objective 1 – Recruiting & organising.

NEC Objective 1: Recruiting & organising

- Enhance our capability to recruit and retain members and meet the organising and representation challenges facing the union in the changing world of work.
- Ensure our union is relevant to all members who provide public services – including those who work in the community and private sectors.
- Identify and develop leadership and encourage union activism from across the union, particularly among young members and provide support and resources for them to lead campaigns
- Enhance our democracy by increasing and widening participation of our activists and members.
- Identify strategic growth areas such as social care and under-5s education and implement a national organising strategy in those sectors
- Encourage the recruitment of local stewards and Health & Safety representatives
- In all trade union activity to promote the benefits of the organising approach

UNISON is now the biggest union in NI with 45,000 full members. This section of the report details the organising & recruitment strategy that the NI Regional Committee has put in place to make this happen. It includes:

• our record recruitment and growth achievements to the end of 2019

• our continued progress through 2020 - despite the significant challenges emerging from the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic

• recruitment and membership trends across sectors and job groups

• current and future organising challenges, opportunities & strategies

**WE ARE
UNISON**

**45,000 members strong
The biggest union in NI!**

During 2019/20 our strategy has sustained the high levels recruitment and growth achieved by UNISON NI over the past 5 years. That this has taken place despite a significant reduction in full-time organising resources following the completion of the Fighting Fund in Feb 2020, and the challenges posed by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, is testament to the ongoing commitment and tireless activity of activists and staff across our organising, negotiating and campaigning agenda at workplace, branch and regional level.

UNISON NI recruitment strategy



Target
= 5000 new members



Development of detailed branch recruitment and organising plans linked to branch and regional bargaining & campaigns



Infill recruitment in health & education, and special initiatives across key sectors, including private homecare, migrant workers & nursing homes



Support for UNISON-wide recruitment initiatives, including effective management of the Fighting Fund



Regional Committee response to Covid-19 restrictions:-



Innovative use of new communications & social media platforms to encourage new joiners & member participation



New projects to engage with specific groups such as new online joiners, newly employed staff & lapsed members



Prioritising our education programme as a key recruitment tool through innovative online delivery & member engagement

Our key achievements



With 45,000 full members we are the biggest union in NI!



Record recruitment & growth in 2019

- 7586 new joiners - 52% above target
- 6.4% yearly growth - the highest across the union



Sustained recruitment & growth during 2020

- 4346 already recruited to end Sept
- 16% above year-to-date target
- 1204 full membership growth = 3%



2019/20 Fighting Fund recruitment targets exceeded yet again

- 3257 new members recruited
- 18% above (2750) target



Successful response to Covid-19 restrictions by innovative use of existing and new communications & social media platforms to encourage people to join UNISON and participate in their union.



We are one of the largest organisations of women on the island, with nearly 38,000 (82%) women members



We are the largest organisation of black and migrant workers in NI



Our membership is getting younger as the proportion of workers under 26 years old who join us grows each year

■ The Regional Committee recruitment & organising strategy and our response to the challenges of Covid-19

The Regional Committee recruitment & organising strategy: In January 2020, Regional Committee agreed its new Recruitment & Organising Strategy. Central to this continues to be the development and implementation of branch recruitment & organising plans that focus on achieving sustainable recruitment through the organising approach.

The Regional Committee also recognised that the ending of the Fighting Fund in February would require a renewed focus on direct recruitment by branch committees and activists. It also prioritised the election, training, mentoring, support and activism of new stewards in all areas and workplaces as crucial to continued growth.

While these priorities remain a core element, the surge of the Covid-19 pandemic in March led to a fundamental re-evaluation of the strategy. The significant move to remote homeworking across the entire union as well as restrictions on traditional recruitment and organising activities at branch level, required an increased focus on the use of existing and new regional and branch communications and social media platforms as primary recruitment tools:

- to ensure our members get the key information they need during Covid-19;
- to enable direct member participation;
- to support our wider organising, bargaining and campaigning objectives;
- to encourage people to join UNISON.

As always, the most successful regional and branch recruitment strategies and activities have remained those that have been linked to local, NI-wide and UNISON-wide campaigns and successful bargaining and representation 'wins'.

During 2019/2020, successes and activities that have secured membership increase have included:

- pay campaigns - including the industrial action in health, the NJC pay ballot and our demand for a real living wage across all sectors:

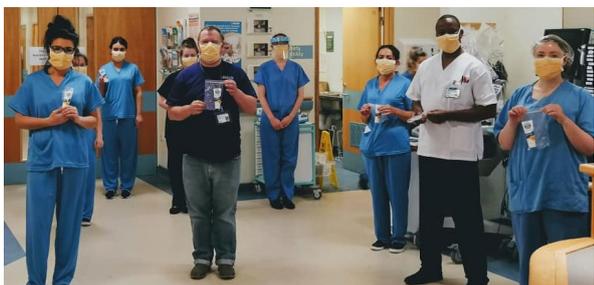
- challenging privatisation, unsafe staffing, attempts to bypass direct engagement with us and failure to produce equality and human rights impact assessments;
- challenging cuts to government funding to the community & voluntary sector;



- bargaining for recognition agreements - particularly in the private homecare and private nursing home sectors;
- our continuing campaign across the public service for the implementation of the statutory duty on equality;
- our campaigns on the impact of EU exit;
- infill recruitment initiatives for key occupational groups, especially within health and education;
- supporting UNISON-wide recruitment initiatives such as 'Grovementer';
- maximising student nurse recruitment;
- delivering special recruitment and recognition initiatives within new workplaces and employers including strategic growth areas in private sector social care, private nursing homes, dentist surgeries, doctors' surgeries and early years;
- ensuring that we use all the communication resources at our disposal to engage with our members during the pandemic.

Our RMS team continue to play a vital role in the Plan - maintaining centralised processing and databases in partnership with all branches, mapping for joint branch assessments and undertaking major data cleansing exercises in preparation for pay ballots.

Covid-19 pandemic priorities and activities: The Covid-19 pandemic in March led to a fundamental re-evaluation of the Regional Committee Strategy, with a renewed focus on the widespread use of traditional and new digital communications and social media platforms as key recruitment tools.



Specific online communications-focused activities that increased our membership included continuously:

- updating our websites and social media platforms at the regional and branch level on the impact of the pandemic across all sectors and occupational groups,
- updating members and activists on our key bargaining and campaigning strategies and successes, such as:
 - challenging unsafe staffing levels and the roll-back on workers' rights;
 - negotiating on key health & safety issues such risk assessments, effective guidance, the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and Covid testing;
 - challenging job relocations and service closures.

The development of the online UNISON College (NI) programme was a significant achievement and has continued to support the needs of our members and activists. We are recognised as the leader in the development of innovative online education and training programmes. Further details are provided in 'The UNISON College' section of this report.

A number of specific projects were also initiated in response to the challenges posed by the pandemic. These included:

- an online joiners phone bank (managed by the admin team) to make direct contact with our new members;
- engaging with newly employed public sector workers, and re-recruiting lapsed and former retired members;

- ensuring that best practice recruitment initiatives are shared across branches;
- undertaking additional mapping activities to inform future organising and recruitment activity.

The remainder of this section highlights the success of this activity.

To be sustainable, the Regional Committee strategy is dependent on branches increasing their stewards base across all areas and workplaces. Regional Committee recognises that we are facing a 'chicken and egg' situation: we need more stewards to engage with our members, particularly during the pandemic; but the pandemic is restricting us from pursuing the original programme of multiple face to face workplace meetings and stewards' elections.

The regional organising team have supported branches to initiate a series of online members meetings and, on receipt of new guidance from the NEC on the holding of AGMs, we are using these projects to support the election or re-election of stewards in advance of the 2021 Annual General Meetings.



Section 2 and Section 3 of this report - outline the many bargaining issues and campaigns - particularly those that affect women's work, children's rights and patients' rights - that have encouraged more workers to join UNISON and have also expanded our role on community activism.

■ Our recruitment achievements in 2019



2019 was the most successful year ever for UNISON NI in terms of overall recruitment and growth. Table 1 and Fig 1 shows that

- we recruited 7586 new members – our highest ever recruitment figure;
- we exceeded our normal target of 5000 new joiners by 52% and our enhanced target of 6000 new members by 26%;
- we recruited 8% more new members than we did in 2018 – the previous record year;
- we ended the year with a full membership of 43,144 –6.4% (2749 full members) more than 2018 and the highest membership increase and growth rate across the union;
- 26 branches ended the year in growth;
- the Fighting Fund initiative recruited 3257 new members – 18% above its 2750 new joiners target and 43% of total UNISON NI recruitment over the year.

Table 1– UNISON NI recruitment by branch, 1 Jan 2019 to 31 Dec 2019

Branch	Target	Total	2019 Recruitment & growth					1yr Growth	2018 Total joiners
			(Jan to Sept)	(Oct to Dec)	(Fighting Fund)	% target met			
Belfast City Hospital**	313	234	138	96	109	75%	78	201	
Belfast Education**	150	324	242	82	212	216%	127	377	
Causeway*	170	250	164	86	131	147%	67	222	
Community & Voluntary**	200	406	301	105	96	203%	150	365	
Craigavon Health**	140	355	200	155	36	254%	121	321	
Derry Education**	150	221	287	-66	174	147%	64	314	
Down Education**	150	167	140	27	31	111%	121	164	
Down Lisburn**	300	491	287	204	240	164%	207	354	
Foyle*	300	541	342	199	226	180%	256	433	
Greenpark**	110	104	57	47	64	95%	29	117	
Health Agencies**	50	71	39	32	14	142%	41	64	
Mater Hospital Trust**	100	104	65	39	55	104%	16	158	
N&W Belfast Health***	162	333	240	93	126	206%	95	280	
NEELB**	150	258	199	59	130	172%	55	343	
Newry & Mourne***	200	235	153	82	95	118%	68	229	
NI Ambulance	85	116	60	56	4	136%	81	29	
NI Blood Transfusion**	12	17	8	9	5	142%	9	5	
Northern Health***	600	771	556	215	419	129%	122	820	
Omagh & Fermanagh*	240	304	193	111	95	127%	129	224	
Orchard ***	160	411	283	128	129	257%	143	384	
Rathgael**	15	2	2	0	/	13%	1	3	
RVH & Muckamore **	463	561	345	216	257	121%	112	419	
South & East Belfast*	200	335	188	147	108	168%	70	280	
Southern Education**	100	126	100	26	59	126%	64	140	
Sperrin Devenish**	80	189	141	48	135	236%	122	174	
UCHT***	300	624	317	307	299	208%	308	527	
UU Coleraine Magee **	40	17	14	3	5	43%	-5	23	
UU Jordanstown**	50	19	19	0	3	38%	-14	34	
Total	5000	7586	<i>(5080)</i>	<i>(2506)</i>	<i>(3257)</i>	152%	2749 (6.4%)	7004	

*Fighting Fund homecare project only | **Fighting Fund initiative | ***Fighting Fund initiative & homecare project

Fighting Fund: Figure 1 shows that during 2019, the Fighting Fund initiative was again a huge success with 11 local organisers recruiting 3257 new members – 18% above the initiative target of 2750 and 43% of total UNISON NI recruitment over 12 months.

27 of our 28 branches participated in the initiative with 10 primarily multi-branch projects covering health, education, the community and voluntary sector, and our 2 University branches which have a combination of in-house and private sector membership.

It is clear from Table 1 that branches participating in the initiative had a significant increase in their membership and a continued turnaround on the ratio between new recruits and leavers.

The presence of Fighting Fund Organisers continued to assist in identifying new leaders, building the activist base and encouraging greater member participation in the life of the union. Through direct contact with members they were also able to identify issues for potential representation and the bargaining agenda.



Direct activist recruitment was also maintained at high levels during 2019 with an additional 4329 new members recruited over and above the Fighting Fund total.

This demonstrates what can be achieved with co-ordinated effort between the branch and staff teams.



The Fighting Fund came to an end in February 2020 and Regional Committee has flagged the importance of developing alternatives, taking into account the huge impact of the initiative on our overall recruitment success and the lessons to be learned from the current organising environment as a result of the pandemic.

The Regional Committee awaits the outcome of the Branch Resources Review to enable us to develop alternatives.

Autumn/winter recruitment campaign:

Figure 1 shows that we recruited 2506 new members between October and December 2019 – 33% of our total yearly recruitment in only 3 months. This was primarily due to major recruitment activity generated by the health pay ballot which commenced on 21 October as well as the ‘Grovementer’ union-wide recruitment campaign. 24% of new recruits during this time were nurses and healthcare/nursing assistants.

■ **Our recruitment achievements in 2020 to date**



Table 2 on page 15 details:

- branch recruitment targets;
- recruitment activity from 1st January to 30th September 2020;
- online recruitment as a % of total branch recruitment;
- growth trends to 30th September 2020;
- growth trends over the past 5-years.

✓ **All the signs are that by the end of 2020 we will again exceed our 5000 recruitment target and will record substantial membership growth across the majority of branches.**

✓ **At the end of September we also celebrated reaching our target of 45,000 full members. We are the largest union in NI.**

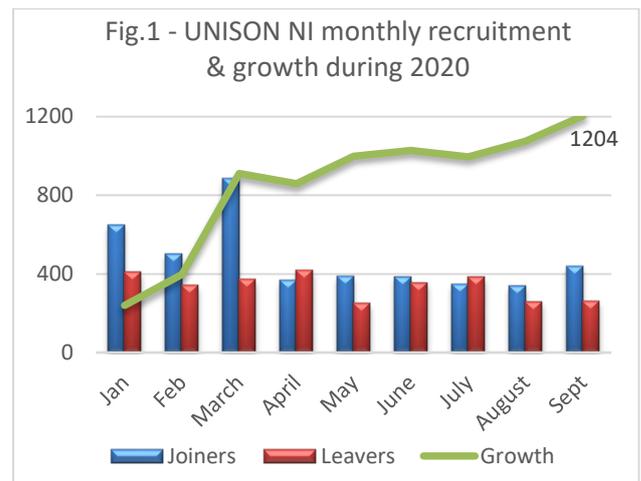
Recruitment and growth: Table 2 shows that during 2020:

- 4346 new members have been recruited;
- recruitment is currently 16% ahead of what we would expect to have achieved by 30th September to meet our 5000 yearly target;
- 8 branches have already met their yearly target in only 9 months;
- UNISON NI has grown by 1204 members – a growth rate of 3%;
- growth has taken place across 23 of our 28 branches with the significant increases recorded in Belfast Education, the Community & Voluntary Sector, UCHT and NEELB.

Fig 1 shows monthly recruitment and growth across 2020 and reflects the impact of

UNISON organising, bargaining and campaigning success on attracting new joiners. For example:

- 649 new members were recruited in January - 66% above the monthly target. This was primarily a result of our ongoing industrial action in health;
- 887 new members joined us in March - 113% above the monthly target. This reflected significant UNISON activity across all sectors to support members on all the issues associated with the onset of Covid-19. There was a particularly notable increase in recruitment in the education sector during this period.



5-year growth trends: Table 2 and Figures 2-6 looks at our growth over a 5 year period. It shows that since 2016:

- we have grown as a region by 19% (from 37,960 in 2016 to 45,000 to date in 2020).
- a total of 27 branches have grown;
- the 6 education branches have grown significantly, the highest being NE Education at 53%;

- the 18 health branches now show sustained growth, the highest being UCHT at 42%;
- in the community and voluntary sector, despite major funding problems, our membership has grown by 24%;
- branches with limited access to the Fighting Fund are those that have more limited growth over the period.

There has been major reorganisation inside many health branches, most notably the conversion of the Mater Hospital to the main Covid hospital and the reorganisation in Southern Trust Hospitals, which has included the transfer of large numbers of staff across the service. As a result, the current recruitment figures are likely to change at branch level as many of the suspended

services come back on-line. In addition, a range of health services, including mental health services, now need to be properly located in the relevant health branches.

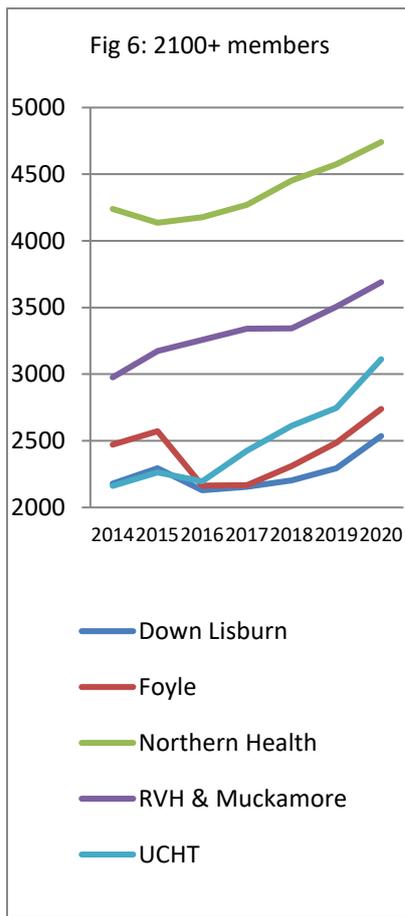
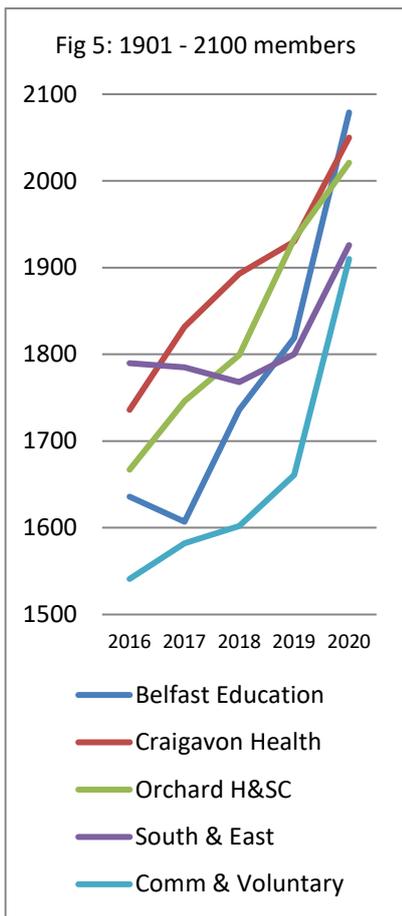
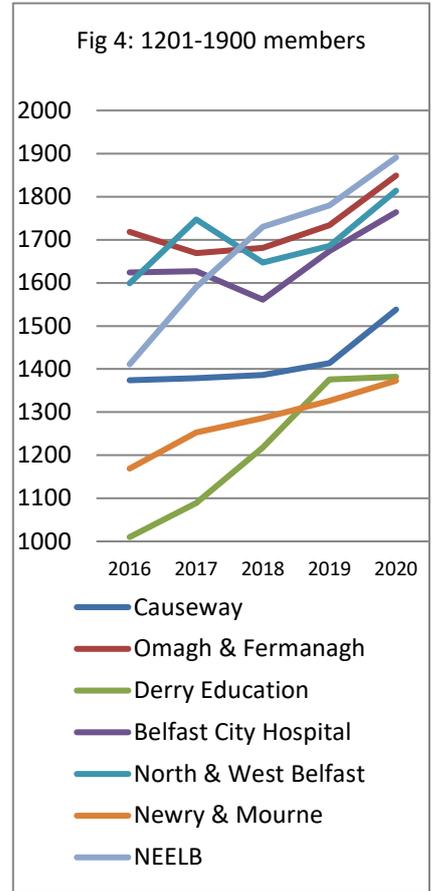
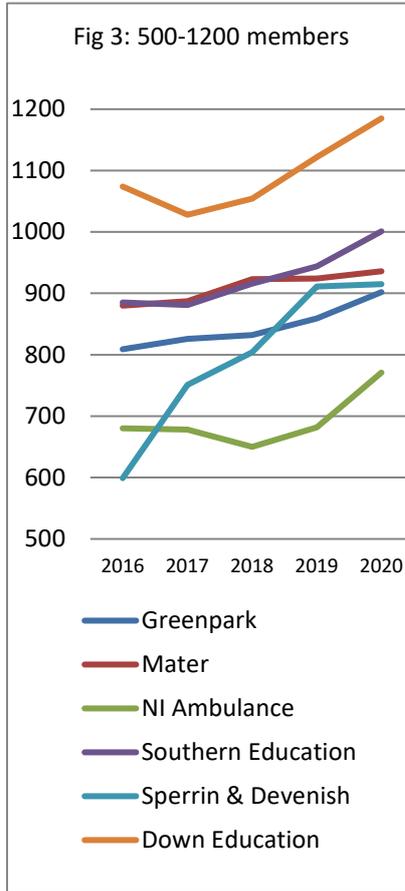
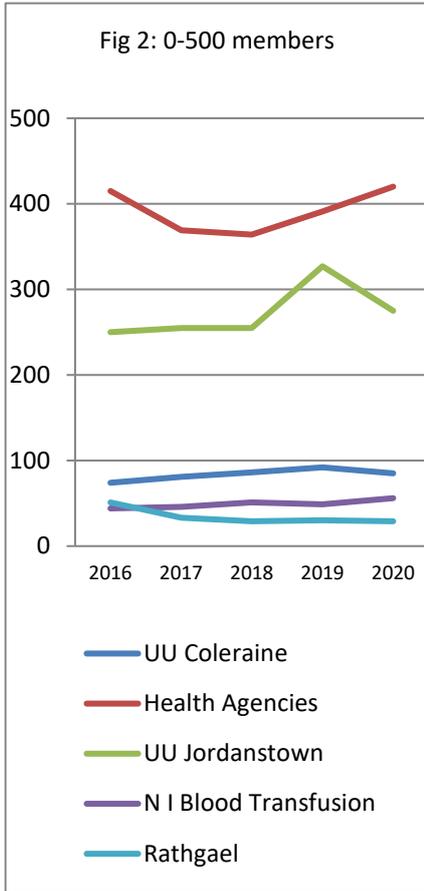
Online joiners: Table 2 shows that during the year, 71% of new joiners joined online. This compares with only 43% in 2019. Regional Committee is initiating a project to transfer the majority of these members to DOCAS.

The highest proportion of online joiners came from branches with a membership spread over a wide range of community services such as North & West Belfast (83%) and South & East Belfast (92%). The lowest proportion of online joiners came from single site health branches such as BCH (48%), Craigavon Health (45%), Mater Hospital (41%) and RVH & Muckamore (56%).

Table 2 – UNISON NI recruitment by branch, 1 Jan to 30 Sept 2020

Branch	Recruitment to date Jan-Sept 2020					Growth trends	
	Target	Total	% online joiners	No. to reach Target	% of target met to date	Jan-Sept 2020 (No.)	2016-2020 (%)
Belfast City Hospital	313	101	48%	212	32%	↑28	↑9%
Belfast Education	150	354	76%	Target met	236%	↑180	↑27%
Causeway	170	147	59%	23	87%	↑53	↑12%
Community & Voluntary	200	375	89%	Target met	188%	↑181	↑24%
Craigavon Health	140	133	45%	7	95%	↓-40	↑18%
Derry Education	150	123	61%	27	82%	↑37	↑37%
Down Education	150	174	63%	Target met	116%	↑23	↑10%
Down Lisburn	300	292	76%	8	97%	↑94	↑19%
Foyle	300	300	53%	Target met	100%	↑33	↑27%
Greenpark	110	48	61%	62	44%	0	↑12%
Health Agencies	50	34	79%	16	68%	↑14	↑1%
Mater Hospital Trust	100	46	41%	54	46%	↓-10	↑6%
N&W Belfast Health	162	196	83%	Target met	123%	↑79	↑14%
NEELB	150	216	68%	Target met	144%	↑120	↑34%
Newry & Mourne	200	106	74%	94	53%	↓-2	↑18%
NI Ambulance	85	52	79%	33	61%	↑30	↑14%
NI Blood Transfusion	12	6	83%	6	50%	0	↑27%
Northern Health	600	429	77%	171	72%	↑80	↑14%
Omagh & Fermanagh	240	153	67%	87	64%	↑34	↑8%
Orchard	160	192	64%	Target met	120%	↑1	↑21%
Rathgael	15	1	100%	14	7%	↓-1	↓-76%
RVH & Muckamore	463	188	56%	275	41%	↑35	↑13%
South & East Belfast	200	180	92%	20	90%	↑31	↑8%
Southern Education	100	93	73%	7	93%	↑32	↑13%
Sperrin Devenish	80	55	51%	25	69%	↓-3	↑53%
UCHT	300	333	77%	Target met	111%	↑138	↑42%
UU Coleraine Magee	40	7	71%	33	18%	0	↑15%
UU Jordanstown	50	13	38%	37	26%	↑3	↑10%
Total	5000	↑4346	71%	654	87%	↑1204	↑19%

Branch 5-year growth trends, 2016-2020



The charts on this page show growth trends across branches from 2016 to 2020.

Patterns of growth or retraction over this period are also identified in the final column of Table 2 on page 16.



Recruitment achievements across key sectors, employers and membership groups

Table 3 details recruitment across our 5 key sectors of membership. It also shows the employers from which the highest number of UNISON members have been recruited and which, in general, also have the highest number of UNISON members.

During 2020:

- 42% of new members (1821) have been recruited in health & social services, a marked fall from 54% recruited in 2019;
- 21% (915) have been recruited in education, a marked rise from 15% in 2019;
- 11% (485) have been recruited in the community & voluntary sector, a marked rise from 6% in 2019;
- 25% (1090) have been recruited in the private sector (including private homecare, contractors and private nursing homes), compared to 24% in 2019.

90% of all new joiners are **women** – well above the proportion of current total women members. The powerful report produced by the Women's Policy Group demonstrates that women have faced the greatest adverse impact from the pandemic, both at work and at home.

In **health & social services** recruitment has been maintained at high levels with issues of PPE, testing, workplace return, and job relocation as major contributing reasons for joining during the pandemic. Significant recruitment also took place during the final wave of industrial action in January.

We are currently undertaking work to determine to what extent directly employed health workers (such as the social care workforce and increasingly mental health services) are being replaced by private and third sector employment. This stems from our concern that the total number of directly employed health recruits has fallen from 54% last year to only 42% this year to date. This sector makes up 63% of our total membership.

Recruitment primarily comes from the 5 large Health & Social Care Trusts. Belfast Trust is the highest recruiting employer with 453 new joiners (10% of total recruitment) and has the highest number full UNISON members. The current state of health service workforce planning continues to be a major issue for us.

There is inconsistency between the directly employed workforce figures held by the Department of Health and those held by the 6 Trusts and we are also seeking to determine if other health service functions normally carried out by directly employed health workers are now being provided by the third sector or the private sector without recourse to proper procurement procedures.



The proportion of new members in the **education** sector continues to grow. During 2020, Covid-related concerns were major contributing reasons for joining including issues of PPE, testing, schools' reopening and return to the workplace. As detailed in Fig 2 on page 15, a particular increase in new joiners was recorded during the start of lockdown and school closures in March 2020.

The proportion of new joiners in the sector has risen from 15% of total recruitment last year, to 21% in 2020 to date. The sector makes up 18% of our current membership. As expected, recruitment has primarily come from within the Education Authority – with 233 new joiners (5% of total recruitment to date) coming from the Belfast area. The EA – Western area has the highest number of full UNISON members.

In the **Community & voluntary sector** recruitment continues to be maintained at high levels but our membership continues to suffer from similar Covid-19 issues as are impacting on other sectors in addition to the additional pressure of ongoing funding cuts, with much more to come as a result of EU exit.

Recruitment in the sector continues to grow as a proportion of overall recruitment and currently sits at 11% - up from 6% in 2019. The sector makes up only 5% of our total membership. Recruitment is spread across hundreds of employers, with Apex Housing recording both the most new joiners (27) and highest UNISON membership.

In the **private sector**, recruitment continues to be maintained at similarly high levels with 25% of new joiners coming from the sector, similar to the proportion recruited last year (24%). The sector makes up 13% of our total membership.

Poor terms and conditions, particularly in homecare, continues to produce a higher than average attrition rate.

Recruitment in the sector has primarily come from Four Seasons Healthcare with 79 new joiners this year. Four Seasons and Runwood Homes have the highest number of full UNISON members.

It is very positive that the proportion of **young people** joining UNISON remains high with 1053 new members in the year to date – 24% of total recruitment during the period. Our challenge remains to grow the next generation of union leaders.

Table 3 - UNISON NI total recruitment by sectors, employers and membership groups, 1 Jan to 30 Sept 2020

Recruitment and membership by sector	Recruitment		
	Jan-Sept 2020	Jan-Sept 2019	Total 2019
Health and social services (excluding private sector)	1821	2277	4048
• Belfast HSC Trust	453	/	/
• South Eastern HSC Trust	334	/	/
• Southern HSC Trust	274	/	/
• Northern HSC Trust	222	/	/
• Western HSC Trust	183	/	/
• NIAS	50	/	/
Higher education	37	42	36
Education & other NJC	915	876	1151
• Education Authority - Belfast	233	/	/
• Education Authority – North East	180	/	/
• Education Authority – South Eastern	139	/	/
• Education Authority - Western	137	/	/
• Education Authority - Southern	73	/	/
Community & Voluntary	485	357	472
• Apex	27	/	/
• Cedar Foundation	25	/	/
• Triangle Housing	25	/	/
• Inspire	23	/	/
Private sector (inc. homecare, contractors, PNHs)	1090	1425	1803
• Four Seasons Healthcare	79	/	/
• Runwood Homes	46	/	/
• Priory adult care services	32	/	/
• Healthcare Ireland Group	31	/	/
(Young members – 26 and under)	(1053)	(1268)	(1838)
(Women)	(3911)	/	/
TOTAL	4346	4977	7510

Recruitment achievements across key occupational groups and job roles

Table 4 details recruitment within key occupational groups. It also highlights some of the occupations from which we have drawn the highest number of new recruits during 2020 to date. It shows that

- 1550 new members (36% of all new joiners) work in admin/professional & technical roles across all sectors, a marked increase from 30% last year. 562 (13% of all new joiners) are classroom or nursery assistants; and 507 (12% of all new joiners) work in admin/clerical roles.
- 1306 new members (30% of all new joiners) work in social service/social care roles. This includes 448 support workers, mainly in the C&V sector (10% of all new joiners); 395 care assistants (9% of all new joiners); and 338 homecare workers across HSC Trusts and the private sector (8% of all new joiners).
- 943 new members (22% of all new joiners) work in nursing roles across all sectors. This includes 472 nurses (11% of all new joiners), and 265 health/nursing assistants (6% of all new joiners).
- 547 new members (13% of all new joiners) work in support services across all sectors. This includes 208 cleaners/domestics (5% of all new

joiners), and 165 catering workers (4% of all new joiners).

The marked increase in the proportion of new admin/P&T workers recruited in 2020, compared to 2019, reflects the substantial increase in new joiners from the education sector (primarily classroom assistants and admin/clerical workers) that has continued following lockdown and the closure of schools in March 2020.



There was a large influx of new nurses and health/nursing assistants during the industrial action at the end of 2019 which increased the proportion of new recruits in this occupational group to 27% last year. With the end of industrial action in January 2020, recruitment in this sector has fallen to 22% during 2020 to date.

Table 4 - UNISON NI total recruitment by key occupational group and job roles, 1 Jan to 30 Sept 2020

Occupational group and job roles	Recruitment		
	Jan-Sept 2020	Jan-Sept 2019	Total 2019
Admin/P&T – all sectors	1550 (36%)	1443	2265 (30%)
• Classroom & Nursery Assts	562 (13%)	/	/
• Admin & Clerical	507 (12%)	/	/
Social services/social care – all sectors	1306 (30%)	1769	2482 (32%)
• Support Workers	448 (10%)	/	/
• Care Assistants	395 (9%)	/	/
• Homecare workers	338 (8%)	/	/
Nursing – all sectors	943 (22%)	1258	2060 (27%)
• Nurses	472 (11%)	/	/
• Health/Nursing Assistants	265 (6%)	/	/
Support services – all sectors	547 (13%)	601	874 (11%)
• Cleaners/Domestics	208 (5%)	/	/
• Catering workers	165 (4%)	/	/
TOTAL	4346	5071	7681

The success of our special recruitment and organising initiatives

During 2020 we have continued special recruitment initiatives in sectors with a traditionally high turnover of staff such as private nursing homes and private homecare. We also prioritised under-5s education and day care in response to NEC union-wide organising strategies in those sectors. These initiatives were reviewed in March 2020 to maximise recruitment using new communication platforms following the impact of the Covid pandemic on more traditional activities.

Private homecare workers project: Homecare is best delivered by directly employed NHS staff. However, we also have obligations to our members and workers in private homecare. Our strategy is:

- to halt further privatisation from the NHS to the private sector and return privatised services back in house;
- to recruit, organise, negotiate and secure recognition in the private homecare sector, company by company.

For a number of years, the key vehicle for delivering on this strategy has been the private homecare project, bringing together the RMT, organising staff, our 10 branches with private homecare members and 2 full-time Fighting Fund Local Organisers. In February 2020, funding for the most recent 12-month project ended with a total of 588 new members recruited by the project - 18% above target. Table 5 shows that in total, 260 new private homecare members have been recruited this year to date. We now have a total of 1588 members in the sector across 54 companies.

Private nursing home/migrant workers project: This is another successful project which benefitted from the Fighting Fund until February this year. Up to 20,000 staff work in hundreds of (mainly private sector) nursing and residential homes. Major employers include Four Seasons, Runwood, Brooklands and Priory.

Whilst UNISON is the largest union organising in the sector, the potential for recruitment is huge, particularly amongst migrant workers who make up an increasing proportion of staff in these homes and UNISON membership.

Recruiting and organising the migrant workforce is a UNISON priority, particularly in the context of concerns about care standards, employment standards and EU Exit. Both EU nationals and other migrant workers are facing major employment issues associated with their employment status, immigration policies, racism and discrimination. Table 5 shows that to date 469 new members have been recruited in private nursing homes this year and we now have a total of 2904 members in the sector, across 149 companies.



Student nurse recruitment: Recruiting student nurses is increasingly difficult this year with many courses delayed, staggered introductions, and the absence of the traditional freshers events. We have adapted to the new circumstances by running online sessions for new students about the benefits of joining UNISON. Table 5 shows that 147 student nurses have been recruited to date this year.

Self-organised group recruitment was more limited this year due to the restrictions placed on SOG participation at branch recruitment events because of the pandemic. However, the Groups made a significant contribution to branch recruitment during the health strike and other public service campaigns; and continue to support membership growth and retention through online communications linked to equality campaigns; the organisation of events; and raising UNISON's profile in key bargaining, campaigning and policy areas.

UNISON-wide recruitment initiatives: Regional Committee threw its full weight behind the 'Grovement' campaign in 2019. 1000 new members were recruited during the month – our highest ever monthly recruitment total and by far the most successful union-wide regional total in terms of % growth.

The following are some of the projects that were developed after March 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Each have benefited from targeted communications with specific sectors and groups.

Online communications & organising project: Details of the online communications activities that have supported recruitment, organising, bargaining and campaigning activities during the pandemic are detailed throughout this report. We are ensuring that we continue to engage directly with members and the workforce, and that they get the organising, bargaining and policy information they need.

Health & safety organising project: Details of this project are included under the ‘health & safety’ and ‘UNISON College’ sections of this report. Its primary goal has been to maximise the health & safety information and support provided to members across all sectors during the pandemic. It also encompasses the new ‘Be on the safe side’ health & safety steward recruitment campaign.

Online joiners phonebank: This project is led by the admin team and since March has involved telephone calls to 2800 new online joiners. This is improving retention and is identifying key organising and bargaining issues.

Engaging with newly employed staff and former members: Traditional induction sessions for new public sector staff were postponed in March. This project is identifying new entry points, and opportunities for engagement and recruitment.

It has also attempted to re-engage with retired UNISON members who have returned to work as well as lapsed members.

The UNISON College as a recruitment tool: The UNISON College has proven to be a highly effective tool for engaging with members and non-members through online activist training, member learning and other initiatives.

Projects aimed at targeted sectors and occupational groups: During the pandemic we have regularly engaged with members across all sectors and occupational groups on the key issues facing them This includes distributing emails, newsletters, surveys and signposting them to up-to-date messaging on our communications and social media platforms.

New recruitment and organising plans were specifically developed for members working in doctors’ surgeries, dentist surgeries and in day-care settings. These included developing bespoke communications and recruitment materials; targeted telephone contact; and the organisation of online member meetings to identify key issues. As a result:

- 61 new members have been recruited in doctors’ surgeries this year – twice as many as the 30 new members recruited in 2019. We now have a total of 229 members in the sector across 104 employers;
- 33 new members have been recruited in dentist surgeries this year– three times as many as the 10 recruited during 2019. We now have a total of 63 members in the sector across 30 employers;
- 40 new members have been recruited in private day-care settings this year – similar to the number recruited in 2019. We now have a total of 149 members in the sector across 73 employers.

Table 5 - UNISON NI special recruitment initiatives, 1 Jan to 30 Sept 2020

Recruitment initiatives	Recruitment		Total full members to Sept 2020	No. of Employers to Sept 2020
	Jan-Sept 2020	Total 2019		
Private homecare	260	519	1588	54
Private nursing homes	469	866	2904	149
Doctors surgeries	61	30	229	104
Dentist surgeries	33	10	63	30
Day-care settings	40	41	149	73
Student nurses	147	/	/	/

Building branch and workplace organisation

This section outlines progress on building branch and workplace organisation over the past year in the areas of:

- branch development – including progress on the review of democratic participation, branch assessments, and relevant development/participation indicators;
- member engagement and participation;
- building the stewards base; and
- branch funding.



Despite the many challenges emerging from Covid-19, branches and staff have developed new innovative organising and communications strategies to ensure that branches continue to function effectively, democratically and that the participation of the membership remains a key priority.

The organising and administrative challenges faced by branches and the staff team as a result of the pandemic have included:

- the closure of Galway House, the NW Support Centre and UNISON Direct;
- a significant move to remote home-working for staff and many activists;
- employer restrictions on movement across and between workplaces, strict social distancing measures, and cancellation of negotiating meetings and representations.

As a result, our normal branch and workplace organising plans and activities faced major

challenges including the postponement of many AGMs and ongoing restrictions on branch committee meetings, members meetings and traditional core direct recruitment and organising activities.

The regional team and branches have responded to this challenge by adapting our recruitment, organising, bargaining and campaigning plans and prioritising new forms of communications - using a variety of technical 'web-based' solutions where appropriate.

In particular, the use of phone, email and social media platforms have been fully utilised to engage with activists and our members and ensure their effective participation. We have also prioritised the continuity of our education programme using innovative online solutions – see 'the UNISON College' in the next section.

The communications strategy which underpins this work is detailed in the previous section, and is focused on ensuring that our branches, activists and members get the key information they need during Covid-19, and are actively engaged to participate in their union and branch decision-making.

An increased number of emails have also been going out centrally from HQ to support members and reps and the UNISON-wide website and social media have been updated more frequently.

The section on member participation details the many thousands of members who have engaged with UNISON employed staff over the period.



■ Branch development

Preparing for the future - The Review of the democratic participation of our members: This Review will culminate in new models of organising and decision-making - all geared to ensuring that the most important people – our members – have much more involvement in the work of the union.

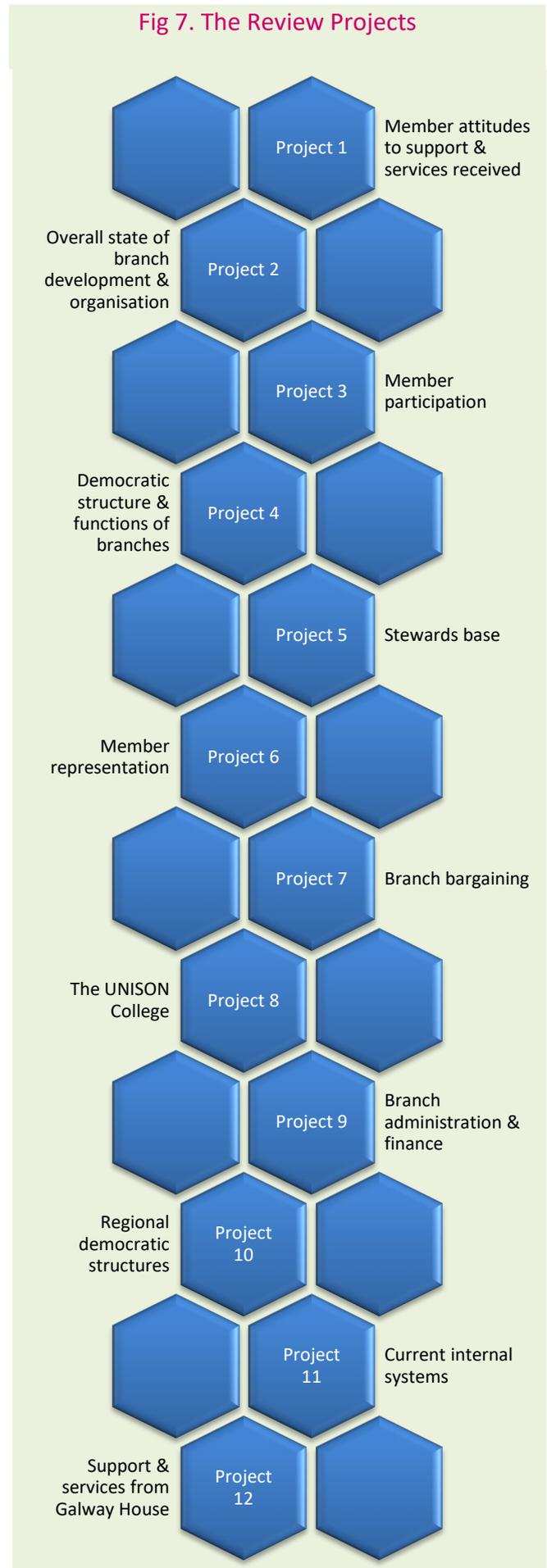
Progress on the 2nd stage of the Review has been delayed due to the pandemic. The desktop review, which creates a profile on branch development and organisation, is currently being completed for all branches.

Following Regional Council, the review group will move to discussions with branch committees and lay structures. Obviously, the review group had not anticipated the impact of the pandemic on future union organising, but this will now become an element of the review. The review group continues to have oversight of this part of the Review with projects jointly led by members of the branch development group and UNISON staff.

Alongside our own review, the NEC is continuing work on the Branch Resources Review and a project is underway to revise the Code of Good Branch Practice. All of this clearly means change for the future and Regional Committee is anxious to ensure that the particular needs of members, branches and lay structures in NI are given the fullest consideration.

- **Project 1 - Member attitudes to support & services received:** To date we have received survey responses from 3300 members, current and former activists which provided important information on member satisfaction; engagement; participation at workplace, branch and regional level; as well as the key challenges/barriers facing activists in their role.
- **Project 2 - Overall state of branch development & organisation:** The most recent round of joint branch assessments is feeding into building a picture on the overall state of branch development and organisation in each branch.

Fig 7. The Review Projects



- *Projects 3 & 4 – Member participation / Democratic structure & function of branches:* Our response to member engagement during the pandemic is building a picture of the barriers faced by our members working outside the large, established workplaces, our community-based members and our members living and working in rural settings.
- *Project 5 - Stewards base:* Reviewing the stewards base, including developing our training programme and maximising democratic participation through the stewards election process will be core outcome of the democratic review process.
- *Project 6 – Member representation:* The collection of data on representation has advanced, particularly as a result of the current restrictions placed on this function.
- *Project 7 – Branch bargaining:* Thanks to the intensive work of our branch based bargainers, we have a much clearer picture of how this key process is developing.
- *Project 8 - The UNISON College:* Our reorganisation of the UNISON college has again given us further insights into the type of education and training both activists and members need to undertake and the barriers they face on participation.
- *Project 9 - Branch administration and finance:* A new project reviewing branch administration and finance will be undertaken directly after regional council.
- *Project 10 – Regional democratic structures:* Before the pandemic, work had already commenced on assessing the fitness of our regional lay structures to accommodate the needs of a changing membership base. This will continue when the review group starts to engage with each lay structure on a programme which will run through to Spring 2021.
- *Project 11: Internal systems / Support and services from Galway House:* Work commenced on the review of UNISON staff support, services and systems but again has been delayed. Projects associated with this Review are led by the Regional Management Team, line managers and directly involve all staff.

However, in light of current circumstances it is important that the issues raised are revisited given the current challenges facing the membership and, in particular, the activist base. It is increasingly important to mitigate some of the key home and work-related pressures facing this core group.

Joint branch assessments, activity-based budgets and their implementation: Due to the health strike and pandemic, a number of the 2019/2020 full-day branch assessments were postponed although the vast majority of branches were still able to complete the new Organising Framework.

Since 2018, this online tool has been successfully incorporated into the full-day meeting but will take on a more important role this year due to the time restrictions associated with ‘virtual’ online branch meetings.

However, it is essential that the abbreviated branch assessment meeting continues to have a robust discussion on how branch finance operates to ensure that every committee member knows how it works, and uses that information to resource the branch plan. This plan must continue to focus on recruitment and organising, core bargaining issues, relevant campaigns, and the resources allocated to deliver goals.



Our organisers and RMS staff will continue to support branches by using our database to create up to date pictures of the members, structures and democratic participation in each branch. This will enable branch committees to participate in informed assessments and decision making.

Budgets will continue to be developed using the computer based OLBA programme. As part of the regional support programme for all branches, Regional Committee continues to offer services on both the general branch management of funds and on budgeting. Where the use of OLBA becomes inactive, the Committee instructs that special support be given to the relevant branches.

Our staff team works in partnership with branch teams and, where necessary, the branch development group steps in to give additional support where difficulties arise. Branch plans only work if they are translated into core agenda items at monthly branch committee meetings and activity is measured. The extent that this is happening is part of the Stage 2 Review.

Branch Secretaries Forum: The Forum was the initiative of Joint Regional Convenor Denis Keatings who sadly died in May 2020. The bi-monthly meetings of the Forum have been an important communication tool on organising, bargaining and policy priorities and the sharing of best practice recruitment initiatives. The incoming Joint Regional Convenor team will consider how the Forum will operate for the remainder of 2020/21

Regional Pool: Due to changing directives on the use of the Regional Pool, which is also linked to the Branch Resource Review, our Pool has grown over a 2-year period. Regional Committee will once again open it for bids in November and revised guidance on the criteria for funding will be issued following discussions with the branch development group.

Campaign Fund: Regional Committee continued our programme of political campaigning, including activities during the 2019 General Election; support for our work in protecting the Peace Process in the context of Brexit; and engaging with party conferences.

Dealing with the impact of Covid-19 has delayed our intention to organise a further event in tribute to our late colleague Jonathan Swallow. This will become a priority over the next several months.

A number of NI branches have previously made successful bids to the Fund. Bids are assessed by the Regional Implementation Group according to strict NEC criteria, must take account of the union's campaign priorities and will primarily involve expenditure of a clearly political nature. This may include campaigns, lobbying, research or other activities:

- that embed trade union principles and values in the membership;
- that have a particular focus on promoting equality and human rights including cultural activity;
- that seek to influence or affect the development of public policy;
- that try new and innovative ways of putting UNISON's policies before the public.



All bids should seek to increase awareness of trade union activity and seek to recruit new members into UNISON. This could include:

- campaigns that directly involve members and highlight the value of specific public services such as school meals, and the contribution of support staff to the healthcare team. Such projects could also involve local communities;
- projects on strengthening the knowledge and values of trade unionism, including uncovering local trade union history and women's history;
- projects which enable the development of self-organisation on a cross-branch or geographical basis;
- projects which use solidarity campaigns to strengthen awareness of trade union values.

Branches and groups wishing to make applications to the Campaign fund are advised to contact the regional office for assistance. Regional Committee also supports bids to the Campaign Fund from our allies such as the Equality Coalition, CAJ and PPR.

Recruitment & organising

- success in meeting annual recruitment targets?
- growth in full membership?
- development of a detailed recruitment & organising plan linked to branch and regional campaigns?
- direct involvement of members in branch and regional campaigns and bargaining around workplace issues?

Branch and workplace organisation

- branch compliance with the UNISON rule book, protocols and financial compliance?
- an effective network of elected, trained and active stewards and H&S reps across departments and workplaces that meets proportionality and fair representation rules?
- an active, trained and effective branch committee with all core posts filled?

Member participation

- participation at workplace level, in collective action and all aspects of branch and regional life?
- participation in UNISON structures, conferences, seminars, training and campaigns?
- participation in branch decision-making through regular members meetings, effective branch communications, elections and AGM processes?

Branch development indicators: As reported previously, Stage 2 of the Review of democratic participation is taking an in-depth look at a series of key indicators to assess the democratic health of our branches across all areas of their activity. See the above chart for some examples.

Results of the activist survey were presented to the previous Regional Council and highlighted that most elected representatives are under pressure and this has only increased during the current pandemic. Increased strain from work-life balance remains an issue in the development of women stewards, and activists in particular, and it has been difficult to fill vacancies in core branch posts, thus increasing pressure on the remaining activists or putting some branches outside compliance with rules.

The difficulty in identifying new health & safety reps is a recognised challenge across the union and the region is taking part in a pilot health & safety rep recruitment project as part of the 'Be on the safe side' campaign.

There are many potential branch development indicators that are used by Regional Committee to measure the democratic health of branches. Table 6 highlights some of the most useful that point to key areas of support that may be needed. They include

- the paid release resources available to branches;
- the current position on branch assessments and plans;
- branch participation in online communications activity;
- branch growth – taking into account current joiners and leavers rates; and
- progress on the stewards' base.

The vast majority of branches completed their yearly branch assessment in Autumn/Winter 2019 and submitted the associated online organising framework prior to the deadline in April 2020. However, a few branches were unable to do so due to the postponement of relevant meetings during the health strike and following the outbreak of the pandemic in March.

All branches have been mapped online to facilitate both the 2019 and 2020 branch assessments.

democratically taken and recorded including decisions relating to budgets, income and expenditure.

Currently, democracy in decision-making is tracked in the section on *branch minutes* and is essential to ensure that decisions are

Compliance with UNISON financial rules and protocols is represented in Table 6 by whether *financial returns* were submitted on time

Table 6 - Branch development indicators, 2019/20

Branch	Paid release	Branch Assessment	Active online	Mapped	In growth during 2020 to date	New stewards from Oct 2019		Branch minutes on File?	Submit Financial return on time
						Women	Men		
Belfast City Hospital	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑28	3	1	Yes	Yes
Belfast Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑180	1	0	Yes	Yes
Causeway	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑53	0	0	Yes	Yes
Community & Vol	A&W	Yes	Yes	Online	↑181	0	0	Yes	Yes
Craigavon Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↓-40	2	1	Yes	Yes
Derry Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑37	0	0	Yes	Yes
Down & Lisburn	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑23	7	1	Yes	Yes
Down Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑94	1	0	Yes	Yes
Foyle Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑33	1	2	Yes	Yes
Greenpark Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	0	2	0	Yes	Yes
Health Agencies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑14	1	0	Yes	Yes
Mater Hospital	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↓-10	1	2	Yes	Yes
N & W Belfast	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑79	3	0	Yes	Yes
NE Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑120	3	0	Yes	Yes
Newry & Mourne	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↓-2	1	0	Yes	Yes
NI Ambulance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑30	0	2	Yes	Yes
NI Blood Transfusion	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	0	4	0	Yes	Yes
Northern Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑80	1	0	Yes	Yes
Omagh & Fermanagh	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑34	1	2	Yes	Yes
Orchard H&SC	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑1	1	0	Yes	Yes
Rathgael	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↓-1	0	0	Yes	Yes
RVH & Muckamore	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑35	3	2	Yes	Yes
S & E Belfast	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑31	8	1	Yes	Yes
Southern Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑32	1	0	Yes	Yes
Sperrin & Devenish	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↓-3	1	0	Yes	Yes
UCHT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑138	3	5	Yes	Yes
UU Coleraine	A&W	Yes	No	Online	0	0	0	Yes	Yes
UU Jordanstown	A&W	Yes	No	Online	↑3	0	1	Yes	Yes



Measuring branch participation: As can be seen from Table 7, branch participation in those areas required by Rule is high. However, in most cases participation is confined to a relatively small group of activists and can mask workload and participation problems faced by many branch committees. Solutions to these issues will result from the Stage 2 Review exercise.

The final columns relate to branch participation in their own local public meetings and demonstrations, those organised by UNISON on an NI-wide basis, and participation in marches and

demonstrations organised under the umbrella of ICTU. In 2019/20, most branches directly organised their own protests and demonstrations on a range of issue



Table 7- Branch participation, 2019/20

Branch	Attend NDC to rule	Attend Service Group Conf	Attend Regional Council	Attend Regional Service Group online	Accessed Equality Training	Took part UNISON NI Demos/ strikes	Attended Online May Day / ICTU online	Organised Branch public events/ demos
Belfast City Hospital	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Belfast Education	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Causeway	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Health Agencies	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
UU Coleraine	N/A	N/A	No	No	No	No	No	No
Community & Vol	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Craigavon Health	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Derry Education	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Down & Lisburn	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Down Education	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Foyle Health	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Greenpark Health	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
UU Jordanstown	N/A	N/A	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Mater Hospital	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
N & W Belfast	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
NIBTS	N/A	N/A	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
NE Education	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Newry & Mourne	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
NI Ambulance	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Northern Health	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Omagh & Fermanagh	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Orchard H&SC	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rathgael	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
RVH & Muckamore	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
S & E Belfast	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Southern Ed	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sperrin Devenish	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
UCHT	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

■ Membership participation and building the stewards base

Annual General Meetings: In mid-March, the growing threat from Covid-19 led to the postponement of a number of AGMs. The major challenges included difficulties in adhering to H&S guidance, and restrictions on attendance at meetings, particularly those on the employers' premises. This risked undermining democratic participation with quorums potentially not being met. AGMs have still to be held in 10 branches and will be reconvened when new guidance is finalised by the NEC later this year. Where an AGM has been cancelled due to Covid-19, decisions have continued to be taken by the existing Branch Committee.

As part of the 2nd stage of the Review of democratic participation, the conduct of AGMs is being reviewed to ensure:

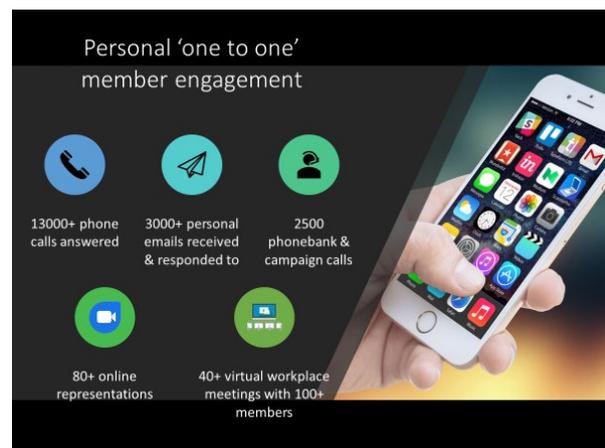
- that member participation is maximised and quorums are met, for example through improved communications;
- that core posts and positions on regional structures are filled; and
- that aggregate meetings take place in accessible venues.

Direct member involvement and engagement: The extent of direct member involvement in branch activity and decision-making is a core part of the Review. During late 2019 and early 2020 thousands of our members were directly involved in demonstrations, lobbies, challenging Board meetings in the public sector and lobbying political parties and local politicians on issues such as the industrial action in health.

Following March 2020, we have continued to develop new platforms to enhance communications across the union and our branches continue to develop their own social media platforms as well. This has ensured that we continue to engage with members & ensure their democratic participation in the union. Support is provided by the Communications Assistant. Branches also continue to take advantage of the bulk emailing system and the text messaging services available from the Regional Centre.

A Review was undertaken to assess the level of staff engagement with activists, members and the wider public in a 16-week period from lockdown in March to mid-July. It identified:

- 13,000+ inbound phone calls answered;
- 2500+ outbound phone calls made to new joiners and UNISON members in specific sectors to identify key issues of concern;
- significant use of online platforms to facilitate member representations and workplace meetings;
- 50,000 newsletters and hundreds of surveys sent to specific groups of members on Covid-19, health & safety and other key issues;
- 7000 members contacted to participate in pay ballots;
- 2000+ 'one to one' staff conversations with individual activists;
- 500+ meetings and briefings with branch committees, JNFs, employers, lay negotiating teams and Self Organised Groups, involving nearly 1000 activists;
- almost 1million people viewing our Facebook posts, with nearly 57,000 actively engaging with likes, comments & shares;
- 47,000 views on the UNISON NI website;
- 3000 followers on twitter, with 123,000 people viewing our twitter feeds;
- 400+ participants on the new online UNISON College education programme;
- thousands of people accessing UNISON NI webinars, video content & films on health & safety & other campaigns.



Steward base: The importance of identifying, electing, training and supporting as many members as possible to take on the core role of UNISON steward across all groups, areas and workplaces has been demonstrated during the current pandemic and remains a key Regional Committee priority.

A core outcome of the Democratic Review process will be to learn from the current experience and bring forward recommendations:

- to develop our stewards training programme;
- to increase activity and develop new stewards within branches;
- to maximise democratic participation through the stewards' election process;
- to increase our base and fill gaps to ensure proportionality and fair representation;
- to develop new approaches to support new stewards and mitigate the work-life balance challenges and childcare barriers faced by many of our women members.

Get elected: The "Get Elected" campaign is being re-run between October and December 2020, with each branch working to a programme with organising staff to encourage members to stand for election as local shop stewards. This will involve the increased use of online platforms to maximise participation at workplace meetings.

The combined figure of stewards and contacts is 661 and has not kept pace with the growth in membership. The number of workplace stewards is not proportionate with the overall women membership and this now becomes the single biggest issue for development in 2020/21.

The same is true for the majority of branch posts and the branch development group will now assist branches to improve proportionality and fair representation by further sharing of posts, and further development of a number of core posts. The capacity of Pathways programme for women stewards will be increased and through the education programme we are developing new online training for our black and migrant workers.

Table 8: Proportionality by activist post

Activist Position	Total 2020	Women 2020	Men 2020	Total 2019	Women 2019	Men 2019
Branch Secretaries	44	64%	36%	44	59%	41%
Branch Chairs	41	63%	37%	41	66%	34%
Branch Treasurers	54	72%	28%	51	73%	27%
Other Branch Posts	134	54%	46%	134	54%	46%
Workplace Stewards	467	64%	36%	495	64%	36%
Contacts	194	88%	12%	201	89%	11%
Total	934	68%	32%	966	68%	32%

■ Branch funding

During the current pandemic, a major priority has been to monitor employers to ensure that their payroll systems continue to collect unions subs and that membership applications are processed. These are centralised functions in NI.

Total income returned to Head Office increased to £4,372,721.26. This represents a 3.6 % increase on the previous year. Total income returned to branches for 2019

increased to £1,120,848. This represents a 6.8% increase on the previous year.



Participation & Structures

Proportionality and fair representation and operation of UNISON NI structures

The gender distribution of our membership in NI is 82% women and the Constitution of **Regional Council** ensures proportionality. Branches and other lay structures fully co-operate to ensure that delegates are proportional on the basis of gender. Self-organised groups and specialist groups participate. Branch attendance at 2019 Council was 90% and 73% of delegates were women.

The **Regional Committee** has met 4 times since last Regional Council including 2 meetings in formal session in January and September, a further planning meeting in January and a briefing session in April. The Committee currently has 39 members and its composition stands at 75% women. All meetings were quorate. The agenda was dominated by progress on union building, industrial action, our campaigns against austerity, crises in the political system, the

implications of EU exit and our response to the Covid-19 pandemic.



Our delivery on UNISON’s core objectives and priorities in all four main areas of work are detailed throughout the report.

Regional Committee members also devote additional time to organising priorities through our subgroups as set out in Table 8 below.

Table 9 – Regional Committee sub-structures

Branch development group	Education group	Regional pool group	Regional implementation group (& Campaign Fund)
Gabrielle Carton Denis Keatings* Margaret McKee Alastair Long Gillian Foley Aine Brennan Kevin Hillick Marjorie Trimble	Gabrielle Carton Denis Keatings* Anne Taggart Maura McKenna Deborah Yapicioz <i>Representatives from Branch Education Officers, ULRs, lay tutors</i>	Gabrielle Carton Denis Keatings* Margaret McKee Alastair Long Gillian Foley Jean Getty Fiona Kelly James Large Catherine McKenna Anne Taggart	Gabrielle Carton Denis Keatings* Margaret McKee Gillian Foley Alastair Long Patricia McKeown
<i>*To May 2020</i>			

Our joint **Regional Convenors**, Gabrielle Carton and Denis Keatings, were re-elected at 2018 Regional Council. Both presided over all formal meetings of our regional lay structures and a series of important engagements at HQ level and with other regions until Denis’ sad death in May 2020.

Both had been active in securing commitments on resources, the development of the Campaign Fund, arrangements with the centre on handling political devolution, and working groups established by the NEC to take forward some of the key resource motions agreed at 2019 NDC.

At its September meeting, Regional Committee paid tribute to the tremendous contribution that Denis has made to our union. Two further tributes to Denis (from the Regional Secretary, Patricia McKeown and General Secretary, Dave Prentis) are included at the end of this report.

Margaret McKee, Alastair Long and Gillian Foley are the **NEC** members for NI.

The **Regional Implementation Group** comprises the senior activists listed above in

partnership with the Regional Secretary. The Group oversees implementation of Regional Committee and NEC policy between meetings of the Regional Council. The Group also has responsibility for decisions on local applications to the Campaign Fund and carries out a Standing Orders function for Regional Council.

Team UNISON is an amalgamation of all branches and lay structures but has not met this year due to Covid-19.

Self-organised and special issue groups

‘Giving voice to tackling disadvantage and combating discrimination’

Government has yet to implement the equality and human rights provisions of the Peace Agreement. Exit from the EU also threatens, in particular, equality and human rights and our Peace Agreement commitments. The work of our self-organised groups becomes even more vital in these circumstances.

The Regional Committee continues to support and take strategic advice from our self-organised and special interest groups. All have played a vital role in UNISON-wide campaigns over the past year, while continuing to deliver on their own extensive work programmes. The following brief reports highlight their key activities.

■ **Women’s Committee**

The Women’s Committee has 48 members representing 23 branches. In 2019/2020, Committee members participated extensively in a wide range of organising and campaigning activity.

The Committee held one formal meeting and one briefing session this year due to Covid restrictions. Deborah Yapicioz and Anne McVicker remain Joint Chairs. It was with great sadness in February that we lost Therese Richardson, a long-time friend and member of UNISON’s Women’s Committee, due to ill health. Therese will be greatly missed.

Our 2020 Work programme covers:

- ensuring the participation of women at all levels in the union;
- tackling violence against women - including domestic violence and abuse, human trafficking and combating sexual harassment at work;

- ongoing campaigning for reform of legislation on reproductive rights, including abortion;
- highlighting the disproportionate impact of austerity on women - supporting gender budgeting and reflecting our demands on the bargaining agenda;
- campaigning for a comprehensive, affordable childcare strategy in policy and in practice through bargaining;
- ensuring that the bargaining agenda reflects women’s health needs;
- WASPI women’s campaign;
- supporting women in prison.

To advance our work programme we have established some working groups as follows:

- menopause (led by Jill Weir);
- violence against women (led by Roberta Magee)
- WASPI (led by Deborah Yapicioz);

Participation: Work is ongoing to develop further local women's committees or forums based on the NDC motion and inspired by active women's committees in the RVH & Muckamore branch and Northern Health branch.

Women's Committee members continue to organise local events and ongoing campaigns within their branches such as the 2019/20 NHS Pay strike.

Trade Union Ambassadors for Palestine: In October 2019 Women's Committee members Deborah Yapicioz and Catherine McKenna took part in the Trade Union Friends of Palestine (TUFPP) delegation to Palestine.



Conferences and committees: A delegation of 28 activists representing 12 branches attended the National Women's Conference in February 2020. The delegation spoke on a number of motions and NI motions on 'The Impact of Welfare Cuts on Women' and 'Brexit and the Impact of Women in NI' were unanimously agreed.

The 2020 ICTU Women's Conference took place on 5-6 March in Wexford. This year's Conference theme was 'Realising Our Rights – Women Organising for Change'. Danielle McCusker moved the ICTU Women's Committee motion on 'Tackling Sexual Harassment at Work'. UNISON's Women's Committee motion on 'Brexit and the Impact of Women in NI' was carried.

Following a 2018 ICTU Women's Conference motion on 'Women in Unions', a pilot 'Women and Leadership course' was launched and ran over 3 days in February and March 2020. Catherine McKenna attended from the Committee.

UNISON is represented on the ICTU Women's Committee by Margaret McKee (Vice Chair) and Danielle McCusker.

Both Danielle and Margaret attended the TU Women's Council of the Isles in London in November 2019. Frances O'Grady, the General Secretary, made an introductory address and gave her support for the NHS Pay Strike in NI. Discussions centred around the rise of the far right, the delegation of trade union women who visited Palestine, as well as focusing on the significant equality and human rights victories gained in NI. The next meeting of the Council of the Isles has been postponed due to Covid-19.

International Women's Day: UNISON NI saw a great turnout for the 2020 International Women's Day 'Rights in Sight' rally on Saturday 7th March. Members from across NI gathered at Writer's Square in Belfast to celebrate and march for women's rights. The rally had a family-friendly, carnival atmosphere, with samba drummers, ukulele players, and circus performer. Participants marched to Belfast City Hall to hear speeches from leading members of the women's movement.

To mark IWD, UNISON's Women's Committee held an event on the evening of 10 March entitled 'Raise Your Voice Against Sexual Harassment'. Condensed workshops formed the agenda for the evening and tied in with the 'sexual harassment has no place in the workplace' event which ICTU organised.



Regional education programme: Committee members continued to deliver the women only element of the regional education programme. These are particularly designed to encourage more women to become active.

This year 15 new women activists attended the Pathways programme, 20 participants attended the Health and History weekend in November, and 6 attended the Building Confidence for

Women course in January. Further sessions on all these topics were postponed due to the pandemic but will be re-run online before the end of the year.

Women in prisons: Recent dates for sessions of the Health and History course with women prisoners at Hydebank have been postponed due to staff shortages in Hydebank and the outbreak of coronavirus.

Abortion and Marriage Laws: The Committee actively supported the campaign in the UK Parliament to place abortion regulations in NI and changes to the laws on marriage, allowing same sex civil marriage and opposite sex civil partnerships to be legal now in NI. Unfortunately, the Minister for Health has refused to bring forward regulations to give effect to the change in abortion law and we are currently part of the campaign pressing for urgent action.

Newsletter: Following on from the briefing session held in April, the Women's Committee distributed a Newsletter which

gave updates and advice to members during the coronavirus pandemic.

Campaigns & demonstrations: Committee members participated in a further range of activity, marches and events in support of UNISON campaigns such as the health pay strike. Committee members and other women members have participated in a wide range of online activity organised through UNISON College, ICTU, and women's organisations.



The work of the Women's Committee is supported by Danielle McCusker, Area Organiser.

■ LGBT+ Group

The LGBT+ Group met 3 times during 2020 to receive briefings on current issues. Whilst it has 141 registered members representing 26 branches across NI, attendance at meetings remains low and the Group will be undertaking outreach with the wider membership list.

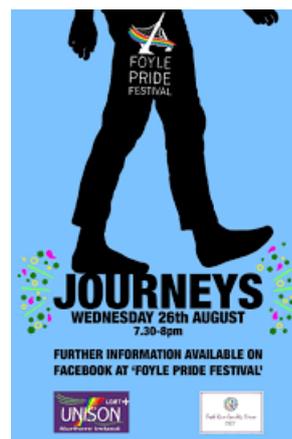
2020 Pride events: Due to Covid-19 restrictions the organisers for the Pride events had to take a very different approach, with Belfast Pride taking place in August, and Derry Pride running into Sept.

Members of the Group have been involved in organising virtual events which were shared via social media. They also produced a photo/video 'best wishes' message for the London, Belfast and Foyle Pride events. The video was then used for a virtual pride walk online.

A further photo shoot was organised by Group members and Causeway branch officers to send a message to Foyle Pride. The Group

combined the events that were being held for Belfast Pride for distribution via email.

Martin McConnellogue, Joint Chair, represents UNISON on the Foyle Pride committee and has played a significant role in increasing our contribution to the LGBT+ community in the North West. Two Foyle Pride events can be viewed on the Foyle Pride Channel on YouTube. The events are called 'Journeys'.



The forum is planning to hold a virtual event to share the Journeys video later in the year, given the success it has had online.

UNISON National LGBT+ Committee: Martin is also on the National Committee working on Questions and Answers relating to the use of non-gendered 'Pronouns'.

Health Service LGBT+ Staff forum: LGBT+ stalls in Trust sites did not take place this year due to Covid-19, but the Belfast HSC Trust dedicated a section of their intranet site and changed their logo on Facebook and twitter to support the LGBT+ community.

Communication and Logo: The Group sent out several mail to promote the Belfast Pride events and shared them through Social media.

UNISON LGBT+ Conference: In November 2019, three members of the Group attended the UNISON LGBT+ annual conference in Bournemouth. NI motions were supported including how we were still unable to enter into a same sex marriage putting same sex couples in NI at a disadvantage to GB.



Marriage Equality: Two historic days occurred over the last twelve months. Following a consultation by the NI Office which UNISON contributed to, on the 13th January 2020, the legal right to apply for a same sex civil marriage was introduced and the first wedding took place on 11th February. However, the right to apply for a same sex ceremony in a Church only became law on 1st September.

Denominations which do not want to host same sex weddings are protected within the regulations and cannot be compelled using legal challenge. However, congregational members within that denomination can amend their own Church rules through their General Assembly or other governing body.

There are a number of denominations including the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church and the Quakers who have agreed to allow their ministers to hold religious same sex ceremonies as well as smaller Churches. This was achieved after many years of lobbying and campaigning by UNISON members through the Love Equality campaign. Marriage Equality was introduced into GB in 2014 and into the Republic of Ireland in 2015.

This led to a situation where a couple from NI could get married in, for example, Manchester but their marriage was not recognised in law once they returned home. Members will be well aware of the resistance to the introduction of same sex marriage and the requirement not just for lobbying but through legal challenge including from our own Henry Flanagan-Kane and his partner Chris.

The Group have been at the forefront of the marriage equality campaign through the Love Equality coalition. Over 1000 members posed in photos with our 'I Support Marriage Equality' photo frame. Many responded to petitions and wrote to their MPs and MLAs. Members turned up in huge numbers for Marriage Equality rallies and profiled the campaign at numerous other events.

This is a victory for our LGBT+ members, families and friends and was achieved by people power. However, we do not yet have full marriage equality as the legal pathway for those already in civil partnerships to convert to marriage has not yet been introduced. We will continue to highlight this anomaly and hopefully by the end of this year, we can say we have true marriage equality for all.

Blood Donations: UNISON welcomed the NI Health Minister's decision to bring the NI blood donation referral rules into line with the GB. This is based on scientific advice and maintains safety while increasing the potential pool of donors which is even more crucial at this time.

The Group has campaigned for this change and we are glad that a further step has been taken to reduce historical discrimination against men who have sex with men and the gay community more widely. We encourage all of those who are eligible to donate.

■ Disability Group

The Disability Group has met 3 times since last Regional Council. Branch participation has increased over the last year and we continue to encourage branches to take up their full entitlement.



Committees, conferences and events:

UNISON is represented on the ICTU Disability Committee by Mandy Rutherford and Michelle McCune; on the UNISON National Disability Committee by Amanda Sweetlove; and on Regional Committee by Marjorie Trimble.

Workplan: The key elements of our workplan for 2020/21 are as follows:

- assessing employer Disability Action Plans across the public sector in the key areas of selection, recruitment and training;
- campaigning on mental health issues in the workplace including raising the profile of the impact of mental health on workers, and raising the need for employers to have relevant policies to provide support to their staff;
- campaigning for the use of disability passports - a document between a disabled worker and their employer which lists reasonable adjustments and support for the employee throughout their employment, including when changing roles within an organisation or when there is a change in line management;
- raising awareness of the Access to Work (NI) scheme administered by the Department for Communities. This provides advice, support and financial

assistance to people with disabilities to take up employment or who are in work and experience difficulties related to their disability. Support can include help with additional costs that arise such as special aids and equipment, adaptations to the workplace, and costs in travelling to and from work. Employers can also avail of the scheme to help with any additional costs.

Response to Covid-19: In response to the Covid-19 pandemic the Committee has been involved in several UNISON initiatives.

A survey of the experience of UNISON disabled workers and Covid-19 found that over half of members worked from home with around three quarters stating that they were more productive or just as productive to being in the workplace. The report recommended a new enforceable right to home working for disabled workers who want it and the increased efficiency of Access to Work.

NI members also contributed to a UNISON guide for disabled workers & Covid-19 and a guide to making UNISON meetings accessible to people with disabilities.

The National Disability Conference has been cancelled this year due to the pandemic and in its place, UNISON will be hosting a "Disability Live!" week from 19th to 25th October with webinars held throughout the week on disability topics such as:

- the impact of Covid-19 on workers;
- passports & disability leave bargaining;
- right to homeworking; and
- welfare reform post-Covid

DISABILITY
LIVE!
UNISON EQUALITY

The work of the Disability Group is supported by Regional Organiser, Joe McCusker.

■ Black and Migrant Workers' Group

The Black and Migrant Workers (BMW) Group had planned a series of meetings across NI during 2019/20 to raise the profile of the Group and to increase membership. However, following a successful meeting in Belfast City Hospital late last year, subsequent briefings have had to take place online and through regular WhatsApp chat. This activity has resulted in the participation of new activists with the majority of members continuing to be migrant workers, reflecting the composition of the NI workforce.

Unfortunately we remain unable to provide accurate figures for black and migrant workers in UNISON. Since the introduction of GDPR and the switch to new recruitment forms, no ethnic monitoring information is collated, leaving us with 'guesstimates' rather than proper data. This is an issue that has been raised by our Group and we are planning to try and solve this to ensure we have an accurate breakdown of our membership by this time next year.

Communications: The Group has produced 3 e-bulletins this year and our Facebook page continues to be a busy platform for information sharing.

Committees, conferences and events: Our delegation attended the UNISON Black Members' Conference in Bournemouth in January. It is clear that immigration issues we have been raising for many years such as fees, health surcharge, IELTS requirements and access to immigration advice, are now echoed throughout the union. This is a welcomed development and makes a lot of the HQ materials and campaigns more relevant to members in NI.

Despite this, there is no change on getting immigration advice to be included as part of our mainstream legal services. Our group will continue to campaign for this to happen. We now have two delegates registered with the Black Members Committee and there have been some online briefings in recent months.

Work with other BME organisations: Last November, the group organised a workshop

with speakers from TumMicro to raise awareness about sickle cell disease which disproportionately affects people from African or Caribbean family background.

Union activities and demonstrations: The Group were involved in various pickets on the health strike late last year. Although the May Day march and other gatherings were cancelled, Group members were able to join associated events online such as the 'London' anti-racism rally on 21st March and a series of organising webinars on black activism.



EU Exit: Throughout 2019/20, the Group has been involved in EU Exit activities and in early 2020 we co-hosted (with CAJ) a seminar on Brexit, Common Travel Area and cross border workers. The Group has also continued its information stalls in various hospitals. These were organised in conjunction with the Migrant Centre NI (which UNISON chairs) and Advice NI to ensure all European migrant workers would get the information and support they needed to register for Settled Status. This was an opportunity for the Group to raise its profile and recruit new members.

At the beginning of March, the Group organised a visit from the3million. This included a 'this is our home' photo opportunity outside Belfast City Hall; a round table discussion and a public event in a local cafe. This was an opportunity for us to brief the3million on the specific issues faced by migrant workers in NI –and in particular by migrants who live and work across the border. This was the last engagement before lockdown and all activities after that were replaced with virtual demonstrations and webinars.

Financial impact of SSP on migrant worker households: In the vast majority of private care homes, staff were put on SSP when they were sick or had to isolate as a result of Covid-19. This had a disproportionate impact on migrant worker families who were more likely to have both adults working in health care. This meant that when one had symptoms, the entire household had to isolate and lose pay. With couples working in two different homes this became a regular occurrence between March and May.

Despite UNISON's interventions, a package for Covid related SSP at 80% of salaries was only put in place from 1st of June to 31st August when it was least needed. Thanks to union negotiations through our recognition agreement, staff who did test positive for Covid and worked in Four Seasons have been able to claim their full salary from 1st April.

Disproportionate impact of Covid on BAME staff: In the meantime, it also became apparent that BME individuals were more susceptible to Covid. Before any research and figures appeared in the news, we had anecdotal indication of a higher sickness level amongst our BM&W members. As research emerged in GB, these fears were confirmed.

An excellent seminar was organised by UNISON HQ team on Covid and the impact on Black members. UNISON Black members in Wales also prepared a very useful toolkit to carry out risk assessments for BAME staff. Locally the Group passed on briefings to our activists and negotiating teams to ensure Trusts and the Department put in adequate measures to screen any vulnerable BME staff.

We also contacted members through our ebulletin and social media to gather information on what measures were taken on the ground. Feedback ranged from people not having been spoken to despite having known underlying health conditions, to members being offered more specific PPE or in some cases redeployment to a lower risk area. We are still seeking research and data for the situation in NI and will continue to monitor what is being put in place depending on developments in the coming months.

Racist Attacks / Black Lives Matter and PSNI response: The events surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement were another striking development during this period. The death of George Floyd moved people all over the globe. In NI, however, the demonstrations organised by black activists (with social distancing and masks) were met by fines and prosecution from PSNI.

UNISON has raised this matter directly with the PSNI demanding that the fines and prosecutions be withdrawn. We have also formally raised it in meetings with the First and Deputy First Minister. It is clear that this action differs from the PSNI response to other events which clearly breached Covid guidelines.



Our group fully supports the calls for the charges to be dropped and eagerly awaits the outcome of the Ombudsman's inquiry.

Support for Refugees and Asylum seekers: Both our English classes and immigration advice clinics are open to refugees and asylum seekers. Most of the Asylum Seekers on the OET class are doctors who need to reach a high standard of English before they can begin on the long road to getting professional registration in the UK. There is still no progress on a local route to allow doctors to get clinical placements and support to practice in NI. Students inevitably end up moving to GB if they want to be able to work as doctors.

Access to the immigration clinics has been a useful service for asylum seekers (mostly to get travel document applications completed). It also continues to highlight the work of our union in the refugee community and give us higher visibility in the BME sector as a whole.

Campaigns on immigration issues: We have been going through a real ‘good news / bad news’ rollercoaster when it came to immigration issues during the last 12 months. A new immigration bill was already coming in focus for our campaigning agenda when new measures had to be introduced in the face of Covid such as a one-year free visa extension, or the cancellation of the health surcharge!

After announcing yet another increase in the fee, the health surcharge was waived for health care staff. This is short of a blanket cancellation. It does, however, offer some relief to all our healthcare colleagues still on visa / work permits.

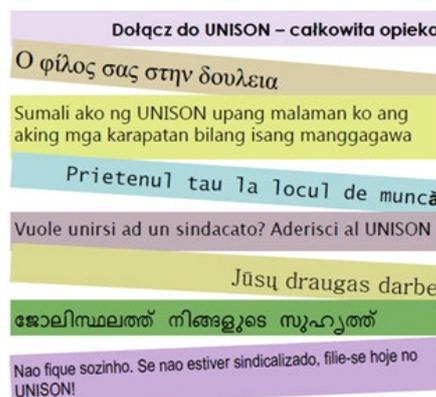
Immigration advice clinic: Our main campaign internally continues to be for access to immigration advice and representation through our UNISON solicitors.

During lockdown, our immigration advice clinics moved to a remote ‘as and when’ contact with an immigration solicitor. This did not seem to work quite as smoothly as the clinics and continues to fall way short of having a dedicated channel through our normal legal services. While clinics and phone line advice would be sufficient for general immigration advice, the consequences of people not accessing the right support when facing a work-related immigration issue can be hugely damaging.

As EU migrants come under normal immigration restrictions next year, we may be facing a wave of employers questioning people’s entitlement to work and potentially dismissing staff on that basis. Without any backup from our solicitors, this could become very difficult for branches to deal with.

EUSS advice clinics: Our members were able to get access to the Migrant Centre NI EUSS advisers through our two offices. In Belfast, an adviser held a face to face weekly clinic on Wednesday nights. Members could also visit the Migrant Centre staff based in the Derry office directly. Clinics have moved to online platforms with the temporary closure of the premises, but the EUSS team continues to be available for referrals.

Immigration advice clinic: Our regular immigration advice clinics were also forced to change format in March. After a slightly slower uptake of the virtual appointments, referral levels are back to full capacity.



English classes: The Group continued to work with the Education team to support the OET and IELTS preparation classes. From the start of lockdown, the English teacher organised online work. The education team secured some laptops for regular students who would have been unable to remain connected. The speaking and listening programme will resume in the autumn via zoom. Referrals have continued to come through.

The online only approach has had positive aspects for some students. For example, it can allow greater flexibility and tailoring to individual needs, it is often more accessible by members living far from Belfast and is good preparation for the online exam. However, all miss the buzz and camaraderie of the weekly English classes.

Table 9: English classes

	Total	M	W
Sept - Dec			
IELTS level 1	10	2	8
IELTS Level 2	6	2	4
IELTS Level 3	13	10	3
OET	13	2	11
Jan - March			
IELTS intermediate	8	4	4
IELTS higher level	12	7	5
OET	15	2	13
March-August Online			
IELTS	14	8	6
OET	16	4	12
Total	107	41	66

The work of the BMW Group is supported by Local Organiser, Nathalie Donnelly.

Special issue groups

■ Retired Members' Forum

The Retired Members Forum has only met once this year due to the pandemic and online connectivity challenges. It has 45 members and its composition currently stands at 76% women.

Recruitment and organising: The Forum continues to assist branches in recruitment and organising campaigns.



Campaigns, lobbying and events: The Forum has continued to campaign and lobby on a series of key UNISON priorities throughout the year with specific action against the removal of the free TV licence for over 75's. Forum members took part in the annual Dignity Code Day of Action held in February in Belfast. This day of action takes place across GB and NI to highlight the difficulties placed upon the older generation by society and the Government.

Forum members participated in all UNISON rallies, strikes and demonstrations running up to March 2020 and have continued to distribute UNISON information on this issue across wider trade union structures and community networks.

Whilst physical meetings have been restricted due to Covid-19 restrictions, the following Forum members continue to represent UNISON NI on union bodies and external campaign initiatives.

- National UNISON Retired Members Committee - Martin Gallagher
- UNISON Retired Members Standing Orders Committee - Joyce Griffin
- UNISON NI Regional Committee – Noel Muldoon & Marjorie Trimble
- UNISON NI Women's Committee – Mary Ferris and Martha McGonigle
- National Pensioners Convention - Rosaleen Davidson and Mary Ferris
- ICTU Retired Members Committee - Angela Boorman and Archie Thomson

The work of the Forum is supported by Senior Secretary, Liz Robinson.

■ Young Members' Forum

Despite not being able to meet physically this year, the Forum continued to grow with 15 young members representing 12 branches. An increasing number of Forum members were elected as young members' officers at their branch AGM.



Briefings and campaigns: The Forum held a number of online briefings to discuss the key issues facing our young members during Covid-19 and how to better engage with them.

As a result, the Forum has identified a number of key issues to discuss as part of 'the month of the young member' in November. These include:

- lack of childcare;
- difficulty accessing the housing market;
- mental health;
- lack of permanent employment and the need for multiple jobs to survive.

The Forum continues to welcome the support of the branches to advertise these events and encourage young members to get involved.

The work of the Forum is supported by Area Organisers Susan Neill and Caitlin Ni Chathail.

■ Health & Safety

This section provides details on the work of the UNISON NI Health & Safety Group as well as some of the additional member-focused health & safety activity undertaken by UNISON NI resulting from Covid-19.

Health & safety recruitment & organising project: The goal of this project was to develop an organising, education and communications plan to maximise the health & safety advice, information and support provided to members during the next phase of Covid-19. Its key objectives are:

- to negotiate specific Covid-19, health & safety, return to the workplace and other related policies and guidance across sectors and staff groups in NI;
- to ensure that this information is communicated to our members, branches and activists in an effective, accessible and timely way;
- to identify, mobilise and maximise the current H&S activist and officer base;
- to ensure that our health & safety activists are properly trained and confident to undertake their roles, particularly with regards to engaging with their employer, carrying out health & safety inspections and risk assessments; and knowing their rights under H&S legislation;
- to ensure that our staff team are trained and confident to undertake their roles;
- to use this activity to increase recruitment and retention.

This activity is linked to the UNISON-wide 'Be on the safe side' campaign which was launched in June 2020 to identify and train health and safety reps. UNISON NI are currently taking part in a pilot to identify potential new H&S reps in Four Seasons care homes and in the education sector.

Health & safety education and training: The Education strand of the project is focused on ensuring that our H&S activists are properly trained and confident to undertake their roles, particularly with regard to engaging with their employer, carrying out H&S inspections and risk assessments; and knowing their rights under H&S legislation.



In March 2020, our health and safety training programme was successfully migrated 'online', with the ongoing provision of H&S reps training and well as a suite of health & safety and wellbeing courses and events. Health & Safety Group members helped to facilitate a number of these. They include:

- 30 reps (57% women) have attended the health and safety training stage 1, with a further 23 reps (44% women) returning for the online stage 2 course;
- 32 accredited stewards (19% women) attended the new Covid-19 health & safety risk assessment refresher course. This was recorded and shared with all registered health & safety officers;
- 24 potential new reps (75% women) participated in an online 'Be on the safe side' health & safety webinar;
- 8 activists attended a training session focused specifically on personal protective equipment;
- 42 activists (81% women) attended other health, safety and wellbeing courses focused on bullying at work, violence at work, foundations for personal resilience and suicide awareness.

Health and Safety Group: The Health and Safety Group met 3 times during 2020. Its key objectives remain:

- to continue to encourage stewards in all branches to attend health & safety training;
- to expand the Group by encouraging participation from all branches;
- to support H&S officers to continue carrying out inspections in the workplace;

- to actively participate and take the lead within all employers' health and safety committees.

Committees and events: One physical meeting and two online briefing sessions have taken place this year due to Covid-19. UNISON is represented on the NIC/ICTU health and safety committee by Ray Rafferty and Emma Jane Cullen. Colin McKinnon was elected to the national health and safety committee.

International Workers Memorial Day - 28th April: The traditional NIC-ICTU wreath laying event at the Memorial Tree in Stormont was not possible this year. However, significant media work was undertaken with the public across GB and NI asking them to observe a one minute's silence at 11am to remember all the health,

care and other key workers who have lost their lives to coronavirus.



Be on the safe side / UNISON website and social media: The H&S Group has supported both initiatives, advising on relevant NI legislation and online materials.

The work of the Group is supported by Regional Organiser, Nuala Conlon

Service groups

Our two service groups are the Health Service Group (covering all health care workers in the public and private sectors) and our Local Government and Education Group (covering the entire education service, local government and other public bodies).



Regional Committee has encouraged stronger co-operation between the service groups, self-organised groups and special interest groups to ensure that equality issues, in particular, are a central focus of UNISON bargaining in all sectors. The work of the service groups and related lay structures is reported in detail in Section 2.

There are 48 members of the **Health Service Group** representing 16 branches. Its current composition is 63% women. This is an improvement on previous proportionality but still requires further action from branches. The group met 2 times in formal session before March, with a further 6 briefing sessions up to the end of August.

There are 19 members of the **Local Government and Education Service Group** representing 10 branches. Its composition currently stands at 73% women. The group met 2 times in formal session before March, with a further 6 briefing sessions up to the end of August.



National representation

UNISON NI is represented by a wide range of activists on UNISON national structures.

The Regional Committee thanks all our reps for their work throughout the year.

Table 10 – UNISON national structures – 2019/20

	NI REPRESENTATIVES
NEC	Margaret McKee, Alastair Long, Gillian Foley,
Local Govt Service Group Executive	Gabrielle Carton and Daphne Harper
Health Service Group Executive	Roberta Magee, Maura McKenna and Jill Weir
Health Sector Committees	Ambulance – Alistair Long; Operational Services – John Murray; Nursing – Alan Philson; Science & Technical – Stephen McNeill
Higher Education	Vacant
Women’s Committee	Anne McVicker, Deborah Yapicioz
Disability Committee	Amanda Sweetlove
LGBT+	Gillian Foley; Martin McConnellogue
National Young Members Forum	Lorna McLarnon; Jason Magee
Health and Safety	Colin McKinnon; Clare Martin (sub)
National Black Members Committee	Patrick Yu & Flora Alfante
National Retired Members	Martin Gallagher



Developing membership services

The UNISON College

The UNISON College NI continues to offer the widest range of trade union education and member learning in the UK.

Over the past year we offered 145 sessions across the two components of the programme, engaging 1696 activists and members on 94 separate workshop topics. 81% of attendees were women. During 2020 the Programme has had to contend with significant challenges as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the necessity to transform delivery and content from a classroom-based to an online-only offer.

Covid-19 and the move to virtual, online learning: With the introduction of lockdown in mid-March, and the closure of the Belfast office and the NW Support Centre, we immediately moved our courses online. Whilst this presented a number of challenges, it also opened up a number of opportunities for development and innovation in the delivery of education and training.

Most of the challenges relate to the different online learning environment and the impact it has had on both the tutor and student. For example:

- many of our tutors have been unable to continue to offer courses as an online class or webinar;
- significant time has been spent developing the skills and capacity of our lay tutors to deliver courses online;
- course materials have had to be significantly adapted to suit online delivery;
- class sizes have had to be dramatically reduced in order to meet the needs of participants.



However, there have been some positive outcomes as a result of this move to virtual, online learning. For example,

- we are now able to offer courses to our members that were not previously available to us, including ELearning modules and accredited courses;
- we are more able to engage members outside of our traditional catchment areas;
- we have been able to create a suite of online resources and content for courses that can be used in the future (online or in the classroom) as part of blended learning options to members where this is their preference.

Innovations in course content and delivery have also included the following.

- We have developed a package of support to equip our members and activists with the skills to engage in online training. This included Zoom 101 classes for our members; and activist training and online resources to help branches host online events and meeting.

- We have created new digital content for courses with, for example, 8 videos developed on topics such as equality and health and safety. These have been watched by 15,000 people and have digitally reached 60,000.
- We have recorded a number of activist training sessions that can be accessed online afterwards to anyone who couldn't attend the course or as a resource to complement learning at the branch level. Topics include a briefing on our Section 75 equality laws; a briefing for health and safety officers; making campaign videos; and general employment law training.
- We have recorded webinars for members and activists to stay up to date with ever changing government schemes and Covid-19 related guidance on issues such as benefits changes, Job Retention Scheme, PPE, and Covid secure workplaces.

ICTU have continued to deliver courses from the South Eastern Regional College (SERC) which has provided accreditation for our 6 day health & safety and our union learning rep training. In order to offer it as an accredited course, a minimum number of participants are required. ICTU also offer a range of excellent short seminars on topics such as redundancy, pensions and disability provided by the LRA and the Equality Commission NI. We promote these to activists to ensure they have the most up to date information on relevant issues.

Supporting UNISON-led partnerships: UNISON College has supported a number of the UNISON-led workplace partnerships through the provision of bespoke training to support the work. This has been facilitated by Pamela Dooley and has included managing challenging conversations and suicide awareness sessions for NI Ambulance Service control staff in Altnagelvin.

■ Trade union education

The trade union education courses we deliver are designed:

- to support activists in their jobs and personal roles;
- to build on trade union values and principles, and
- to develop activists with the skills and confidence necessary to effectively organise, negotiate, represent and campaign.

Over the period, these courses have ranged from half day to three-day modules; and from classroom-based to online-only sessions. 73% of attendees over the past year were women. In addition, a small number of UNISON activists completed courses directly with ICTU. Many elements of this part of the programme are open to activists and members alike.

Following the postponement of a number of activist courses due to Covid-19 and tutor availability, the entire month of September was dedicated to activist training with the re-running of popular branch officers training; representation skills; health & Safety; and stewards training courses.

Leadership development, particularly in the digital age, is a crucial element of the new programme with specific courses focused on leading the union; and engaging with members in a digital environment - including learning from our success and the lessons from our allies and other campaigns.



We have also increasingly recorded sessions and produced online content on key issues related to Covid-19; health and safety; equality; and employment law which our activists have access to at any time of the day.

Participants on our organising steward and health and safety courses also have access to a 'Padlet' which allows them to access all resources digitally including rule books, common terms and conditions handbooks and resources to help them to engage with members when face to face meetings are not practical.

The Organising Steward: The *organising steward (module 1)* course was initially classroom based but was completed by 55 new stewards online following a significant rewrite.

The subsequent *organising steward (module 2)* course was also run online and has so far delivered to 32 new stewards who have now completed their ERA accreditation. An online *stewards induction session* was organised for 11 new stewards as an interim measure prior to the development of the new online modules.

Stewards & representation: In total, 63 members (65% women) attended general stewards and representation courses during 2019/20. The *representing members on grievance and disciplinary hearings* course was rewritten for online delivery and this included a session on representing members via video conferencing.

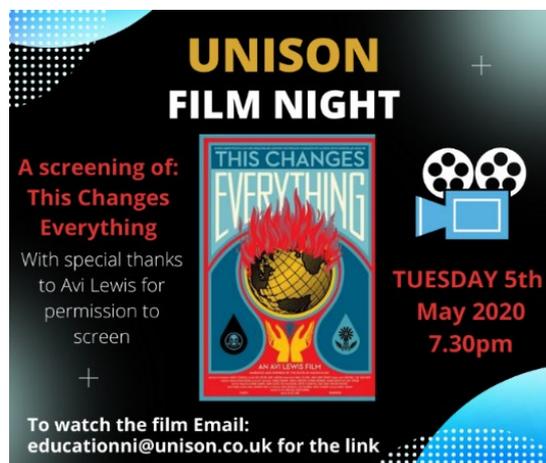


Negotiation, campaigning and equality: In total, 96 members (77% women) attended 9 courses designed to equip our activists with negotiating and campaigning skills, as well as the use of equality tools in these areas.

We introduced a new workshop on *digital organising* attended by 29 activists (93%

women). We also hosted monthly film events and discussions on issues related to equality and human rights, climate change and global solidarity respectively.

The three films '*Inez McCormack - a challenging woman*'; '*This changes everything*'; and '*Killing Gaza*' were attended online by 36 activists, but were subsequently distributed and watched by thousands of activists and members.



Health & safety: Covid-19 has reinforced the necessity to increase the number of health and safety stewards we recruit and train. It has also simultaneously increased member and activist interest in this area of activity.

The health & safety module 1 and 2 courses offer branches additional facility time for trained reps to act on behalf of members.

30 reps attended the *health & safety module 1* course with a further 23 reps returning for *health & safety module 2*. The online nature of the course delivery has meant reduced class sizes, but more courses are being offered to compensate with at least one a month to the end of the year.

A new *Covid-19 health & safety risk assessment* refresher course for existing reps was developed with 32 accredited H&S stewards in attendance. This was recorded and shared with all registered H&S officers

As part of the 'Be on the safe side' health and safety rep recruitment campaign, an online *health & safety seminar* was held for 24 potential new reps (75% women).

A further webinar on *personal protective equipment* was also attended by 8 activists. Additional online health and safety video content has been accessed by over 13,000 members.

4 other **health, safety and wellbeing courses** were offered to activists to enable participants to have the freedom to reflect on cases they have dealt with.

These included *bullying at work* (7 women activists); *violence at work* (11 activists – 64% women); *foundations for personal resilience* (19 activists – 90% women); and *suicide awareness* (6 activists – 50% women).

Branch officer training: We ran a range of courses targeted at branch officers. These courses were attended by 19 activists and supported specific roles such as *health & safety* (6 activists – 1 woman) - which revisited the area of work place inspections and health & safety members meetings; *welfare* (4 activists – 3 women), *union learning* (3 women activists); and *branch finance and governance* (6 women activists).

Unfortunately, our **development education programme for women activists** was particularly affected as a result of the move to online learning as it was primarily delivered through a series of workshops and weekend schools. However, 42 women activists and members were able to participate before April.

20 women attended the *pathways* course which continues to be a key route for new and aspiring women activists to develop knowledge, skills and confidence. 16 women attended the *women's health & history* course which again has attracted a good mix of members from both health and education, and 6 women attended the *building confidence for women* course. A priority for the remainder of 2020 and 2021 will be to expand this part of the programme into online delivery.

Building new leaders and refreshing the skills of existing leaders remains a key priority for the programme with 58 activists (79% women)

participating in the *ERA refresher* course. This is a mandatory course for all elected activists to ensure that they retain their release and remain covered to represent members.

Three digital skill courses were attended by 43 activists including sessions on *engaging with members on online platforms* (25 activists – 84% women); *creating digital content* (9 activists – 89% women); and *capture the campaign via video* (9 activists – 84% women).

Our **planning for retirement** course was again very popular with 58 activists attending (74% women). 3 additional retirement courses focused on *pensions* were held online and attracted 81 activists (93% women).

Partnering with self-organised groups: We continue to work closely with our self-organised and special issues groups on a range of courses and training. For example, the black & migrant workers group continued to work with the Education team to support the OET and IELTS preparation classes.

Members of the health & safety forum have also played an important role in courses connected with Covid-19 and the 'Be on the safe side' health & safety rep recruitment campaign.



Table 11: UNISON College trade union education by course and main topic, 1 Oct 2019 to 30 Sept 2020

Course	No. of Sessions	No of Student Places		
		Total	M	F
STEWARDS INDUCTION TRAINING				
Stewards Induction Session**	1	11	9	2
The Organising Steward (Module 1)***	4	55	38	17
The Organising Steward (Module 2)**	3	32	18	14
Total	8	98	65	33
2018/19	10	127	53	74
STEWARDS & REPRESENTATION				
Agenda for Change*	2	22	16	6
Employment Law (general)*	1	10	5	5
Representing members at grievance & disciplinary hearings**	1	4	2	2
ICTU – LRA & Equality (organised externally by ICTU)	2	14	8	6
Representing members in bullying cases *	1	3	2	1
Representing members with social media breaches**	1	10	8	2
Total	8	63	41	22
2018/19	19	119	29	90
NEGOTIATING AND CAMPAIGNING				
Digital Organising***(see note 2)	2	29	27	2
Job retention scheme briefing**(see note 3)	1	6	6	0
Covid-19 Benefits (Law Centre)**	1	11	5	6
Total	4	46	38	8
2018/19	7	64	17	47
EQUALITY TRAINING				
Understanding power & challenging sectarianism***	2	14	11	3
Inez McCormack – A Challenging Woman Film** (see note 4)	1	15	14	1
Global Solidarity Film & Discussion Series** (see note 5)	2	21	11	10
Total	5	50	36	14
2018/19	5	67	18	49
HEALTH & SAFETY REPS				
Health & Safety Module 1***	3	30	17	13
Health & Safety Module 2**	3	23	10	13
H&S Covid-19 Risk Assessment - H&S Accredited stewards**	1	32	6	26
Total	6	85	33	52
2018/19	7	86	32	54
HEALTH & SAFETY & WELLBEING				
Bullying at work*	1	7	7	0
Violence at work*	1	11	7	4
Foundations of Personal Strength & Resilience***	2	19	17	2
Suicide Awareness for Activists*	1	6	3	3
'Be on the safe side' health & safety seminar**	1	24	18	6
PPE webinar**	1	8	1	7
Total	8	75	53	22
2018/19	17	203	38	165

Course	No. of Sessions	No of Student Places		
		Total	M	F
BRANCH OFFICER TRAINING				
Finance & the organised branch*	1	6	6	0
Branch Health & Safety Officer**(see note 2)	1	6	1	5
Branch Welfare Officer**	1	4	3	1
Union Learning Reps*	1	3	3	0
Total	4	19	13	6
<i>2018/19</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>42</i>
DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION FOR WOMEN				
Building Confidence for women*	1	6	6	0
Women's health & history*	1	16	16	0
Pathways*	1	20	20	0
Total	3	42	42	0
<i>2018/19</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>96</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>96</i>
BUILDING NEW LEADERS & UPDATING EXISTING LEADERS				
ERA Refresher***	5	58	46	12
Mentoring & Support*	1	1	1	0
Digital skills - Engaging with members on online platforms**	2	25	21	4
Digital skills - Creating digital content**	1	9	8	1
Digital skills - Capture the campaign via video**	1	9	8	1
Total	10	102	84	18
<i>2018/19/</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>97</i>
PLANNING FOR RETIREMENT				
Planning for retirement – pension sessions**	3	81	75	6
Planning for retirement*	1	58	43	15
Total	4	139	118	21
<i>2018/19</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>
TOTAL 2019/20	60	719	523 (73%)	196 (27%)
<i>2018/19</i>	<i>86</i>	<i>946</i>	<i>714 (76%)</i>	<i>232 (24%)</i>

Notes:

- (1) * Classroom-based course ** Online course *** Mixed classroom-based / online course
- (2) This online session was recorded and distributed to all activists who registered to the course.
- (3) This online session was recorded and distributed to all activists
- (4) The film was subsequently uploaded to Facebook and viewed over 1000 times
- (5) The 2 films in the series were 'Killing Gaza' and 'This Changes Everything', a film about climate change



■ Member learning programme

Our member learning programme offers courses on personal development and continuing professional development. It is primarily aimed at members but is also open to all elected UNISON representatives.

This part of the programme offered 56 wide-ranging topics this year covering areas such as professional registration, personal well-being, leadership at work, and promoting best practice in specialist areas. 977 learners (87% women) attended a mixture of classroom-based and online courses. Feedback from organisers and workplace reps on the programme as a recruitment tool is consistently positive.

The majority of the Programme has traditionally catered to our members in health, but this year a significant number of additional courses were directed at our members in education and the community and voluntary sector.

For example, the training organisation Ascert (one of our learning partners) has developed a number of courses for our members in education around challenging young people in classroom environments. These included courses such as *working with young people*; *dealing with challenging behaviour*; and *safeguarding children*.

In addition, *Makaton*, a unique language programme that uses symbols, signs and speech to enable people with learning or other difficulties to communicate, was one of our most successful courses with 44 learners (96% women) attending over 3 sessions. Another 2 courses have been booked for November to meet demand.

We successfully expanded our offer to locations in Newry, Omagh, Enniskillen and Ballymena prior to lockdown. Our online offering has continued this expansion and has increased the participation of members in more rural areas.

In addition, we were also able to outreach to schools where we have high density membership and offered CPD courses during 'twilight' shifts and staff training sessions for our members. These included courses on *safe talk*; *mindfulness*; and *interview skills*. We have also been approached by school partnerships to deliver the same courses in coming years.



Managed and administered by ICTU, the **Union Learning Fund (ULF)** was established in 2002 by Government to promote trade union learning activity. The Fund recognises the role that unions play in engaging adults who have been disadvantaged or excluded from education in the past, and supports projects that seek to develop skills, achieve qualifications and promote lifelong learning opportunities within the workplace.

During the year UNISON continued to deliver successfully on the ULF learning outcomes, primarily through the following:

- Continuing professional development (CPD) courses and workshops, including IELTS English language and OET language test for healthcare professionals sessions;
- Essential skills courses;
- Open University modules, including K101 Introduction to social care.

This work is normally supported with £35,000 from the ULF but we secured an additional £7,000 to support online delivery at the beginning of lockdown.

We have since secured an increase in 2020/21 funding to £40,000 with the guarantee of around £25,000 from the 5 HSC Trusts to pay for the new *K102 health & social care* module. This will allow us to fund more student places on K102 this year.



Open University: The *K101 Introduction to health & social care* module has continued to offer our members a real opportunity to progress into new roles with 117 students participating in this year's intake. The next round of funded places for K102 was delayed from October 2020 until February 2021 due to classroom restrictions and the need to provide the wrap around support required.

This delay caused some issues for members who had hoped to progress to nursing this year. However, we were able to support 52 of them (90% women) through the application process and with student finance and/or UNISON learning grants. This enabled them to enrol in a fully digital course offered by the Open University that included webinars and one to one support sessions. A further 10 places were paid for by the Belfast HSC Trust.

Essential skills: We currently hold an expression of interest list for essential skills courses in English and Maths. There is currently no facility within the South Eastern Regional College or other providers to run online essential skills programmes and are currently in discussion with independent tutors to secure an online version.

This will be a practical solution at a time of ongoing social distancing and will also allow us to run essential skills courses more often, as currently we need a minimum of 12 to start the course. Given that those who have expressed an interest are not all from one area, an online offer would facilitate all learners at the one time.

Bursaries: UNISON continues to actively promote a range of bursaries for study towards trade union studies, women's studies, GCSEs, vocational courses and the Open University. 15 members were awarded a bursary during 2020. The scheme was so successful this year that it had to be topped up and then closed before year end.

E Learning modules: UNISON also offered 550 free online, distance learning modules to our members. We promoted this scheme and 20 of our members accessed accounts in order to complete these.

HSC Trust partnerships: In each Trust, local UNISON reps are involved in education/learning groups. The nature of these varies from Trust to Trust and UNISON has a number of seats on each one. The focus of these partnerships is widening participation and developing new pathways for staff to progress.

Our K102 programme is hosted through this partnership and enables members time off to complete study days and the use of facilities on site for courses. It also offers administrative support in delivering the programme and paid places on the course.

UNISON is also represented on a number of external bodies relating to learning and career development including:

- NI Social Care Council Working Group on HSC qualifications;
- Northern Trust Support Workers Learning & Development Group.

Table 12: UNISON College member courses and main topic, 1 Oct 2019 to 30 Sept 2020

Course	No. of sessions	No. of student places		
		Total	F	M
Protecting professional registration				
Writing statements for NMC/HCPC/NISCC	1	14	12	2
Supporting yourself and others				
And breathe	1	5	5	0
Autism – Positive Behaviour Support	2	26	28	2
Bullying at work	1	7	7	0
Caring for the Older person	1	19	17	2
Dignity at the heart of social care	2	11	11	0
Domestic Abuse	1	13	13	0
First Response in Mental Health	1	26	18	8
Managing your time and getting stuff done	1	6	4	2
I've a Teenager – Get me out of here	1	8	7	1
Managing Challenging Conversations	2	19	13	6
Mind & Body	1	6	6	0
Mindfulness – Advancing your practice	2	29	29	0
Presentation and Public Speaking skills	1	7	6	1
Safe Talk	1	21	19	6
Stress	2	12	8	4
Substance Misuse Awareness	3	17	10	7
Suicide First Aid	1	5	5	0
Understanding Alcohol	2	9	7	2
Supporting you in your job				
5 steps to mental health and wellbeing	1	5	4	1
Catheterisation	1	12	11	1
Communication from the inside out	1	14	12	2
Dealing with challenging behaviour	1	1	10	0
Dementia – An introduction	1	7	7	0
Dementia – stress and distress	1	10	10	0
Dementia – understanding pain	1	14	14	1
Diabetes	1	10	10	0
Dignity at the heart of social care	3	18	18	0
Dysphagia Care	1	9	8	1
First Aid	1	6	5	1
Hidden harm and safeguarding children	1	5	5	0
Interview skills for health and social care staff	1	2	1	1
IV Administration of drugs	3	17	16	1
K101	1	117	108	9
K102 Application support	2	52	47	5
Learning Disability – overcoming barriers for people to	1	5	5	0
Makaton	4	44	42	2
Managing an infection outbreak in a care home	1	6	4	2
Managing potentially violent situations	1	10	6	4
OET ILETS Preparation classes	4	107	66	31
Palliative Care – An intro for nurses & AHP's	1	4	4	0
Palliative Care – Good grief	1	9	8	1
Palliative Care – Pain Assessment & Management	2	33	31	2
Palliative Care – Spirituality	1	12	12	0
Palliative Care Emergencies	1	18	18	0
Palliative Care symptom management	2	32	30	2
Safeguarding children – parental substance misuse	1	11	5	6
Parkinson's – Awareness and management	1	9	8	1
Promoting good stoma care	1	8	8	0
Understanding fluid & electrolyte balance in health care	2	11	8	3
Understanding pathobiology in neurological health care	1	7	7	0
Understanding illicit drugs	1	4	3	1
Understanding pathology in renal health care	1	29	25	4
Understanding prescription drugs	2	6	4	2
Wound Care – assessment and management	2	29	25	4
Digital Skills				
Zoom 101	6	24	21	3
Total 2019/20	85	977	851	134
2018/19	137	1847	1533 (87%)	314 (17%)

There for you - Welfare services

UNISON NI Welfare Group: The Group met 3 times this year with 31 members (75% women) and 13 branches participating. The Group has successfully encouraged more branch welfare officers to attend meetings in order to share information and good practice. There were 5 newly elected branch welfare officers following this year's branch AGMs and they have been invited to join the Group. The Group online AGM is scheduled for 23 November 2020. Margaret McKee (NEC) is the Welfare Trustee for UNISON NI.

Octopus lottery: The former Octopus lottery was re-launched in 2018 and the Group has a sign-up campaign in place. The annual Regional Council fundraiser will not be possible this year and the Group has actively encouraged UNISON NI branches to donate to the special Covid-19 fund.

Covid-19 Grant: There was a huge amount of applications received from members across the union for this £250 grant which has helped those suffering financially due to the impact of the virus. 240 UNISON NI members applied for the grant and 156 met the criteria. NI branches made generous donations to this fund.

UNISON Living - Financial Services

In March, as a result of Covid-19, the distribution of any marketing materials and regional visits by UNISON Living partners were suspended. The current status of each supplier has been communicated to branches and posted on the UNISON Website. The result has been a marked reduction in the volume of business done with every supplier.

UNISON Protect (formerly UIB) distributed a UNISON prepaid cashback card promotion to all branches in December. A further email to all members on free £5,000 Accidental Death Insurance in March 2020 resulted in 1,770 website hits (compared to 1,275 in 2019) and 1,236 free Insurance registrations (compared to 716 in 2019).



Welfare Grant Payments 2019/20: 58 UNISON NI members applied for assistance and 33 met the criteria. Financial assistance covers items such as clothing and emergency grants; white goods and furniture; special payments; funeral and utility costs. Regional Committee congratulates branch welfare officers on obtaining these vital payments/items for members in crisis.

Winter Fuel Grants 2020: 74 members applied and 44 were successful.

School Uniform Grants 2019: The 2020 grant was only launched in August 2020 and closed in September due to Covid-19. 133 UNISON NI members have applied and are still being processed.

The Welfare Group is supported by Senior Secretary, Liz Robinson.

Their UNISON Rewards App produced 254 sign ups to the end of December 2019.



LV have reported a 4% increase in policies sold to NI members compared to the previous year. They also donated a further £100 in shopping vouchers to be used for recruitment initiatives.

Abbey Insurance have rebranded as **Abbey Autoline**. Communications were sent to all branches to advise of the change.

Abbey attended most branch AGM'S and has continued to engage with our branches throughout the year.

Lighthouse have conducted 92 appointments with their client services team and have completed 6 surgeries and 7 seminars in various branches with a total of 154 attendees. In addition, they have attended 3 UNISON College planning for retirement courses, all by Webinar.

UNISON Living seminar: UNISON HQ held a UNISON Living seminar in late 2019 which was attended by all service providers and most UNISON regions.

A new UNISON Living website is being developed and an up-to-date contact list will be provided for each suppliers with allocated representatives to each region. UNISON NI again raised concerns that the majority of suppliers had never visited NI.

Legal services

The following is an update report from our solicitors Thompsons to the end of August 2019 on cases and activity.



■ UNISON Personal Injury Cases - Sept 2019 to Aug 2020

Table 13 - UNISON Personal Injury Cases from Sept 2019 to Aug 2020

	2019-2020	2018-2019
Cases received	144	162
Cases closed	167	181
Cases won	72	93
Cases lost	5	1
Cases discontinued/turned down	61	71
Cases where no contact from client	29	16
Turnaround time average	16 months	13 months
Damages	£800,518	£592,758
Average Damages	£11,118	£6,373

The following are some notable outcomes:

- **£150,000 for Cook.** The member received damages for significant injuries sustained when a heavy cage fell, trapping the member during the course of their employment with the Education Authority.
- **£87,500 for Social Care Worker.** The member sustained a severe leg injury following a fall when the stairs they were descending gave way during the course of their employment in a children's home.
- **£27,500 for Cleaner.** The member sustained leg burns when they came into contact with an industrial strength floor polish.
- **£40,000 for Classroom Assistant.** The member sustained a serious wrist injury when they fell from a chair during their employment with the Education Authority.
- **£13,000 for Residential Care Work.** The member sustained injuries when they were assaulted by a patient during the course of their employment with the Southern Trust.
- **£24,000 for Healthcare Assistant.** The member trapped their hand in a heavy door during the course of their employment in a private nursing home.
- **£25,000 for Porter.** The member sustained a knee injury when the trolley they were pushing fell into a gap in the floor during the course of their employment with the Northern Trust.
- **£58,000 for Care Worker.** The member suffered a serious fracture to their leg when they tripped on a manhole cover.

■ Employment Rights

In common with all offices of Thompsons Solicitors in the UK, Thompsons NI has an Employment Rights (ER) Unit in its Belfast office staffed by solicitors who specialise in employment and discrimination law and provide a range of services to support the work of union officials as below:

Advice to Officials: Advice and assistance is provided to full-time officials in dealing with

industrial relations, employment law, and discrimination issues in the workplace.

Advice to Members: Where appropriate, advice is provided directly to members when they are referred by a full-time official.

Individual Cases: A number of more complex cases including discrimination cases are referred to the ER team to provide representation at Tribunal or in court.

■ Extended legal services, training and events

Free wills service: Members were able to avail of the Free Wills Service. Solicitors attended a number of branch functions to advise on free wills.

Criminal Law: Criminal representation was provided for members at police stations facing both work (e.g. rape, theft, fraud, assault and ill-treatment) and non-work (e.g. road traffic) allegations. For those charged, representation was provided at court where required. In one very recent case of drink driving we successfully deployed a 'special reason' argument to reduce an obligatory 12-month disqualification to a mere 6 weeks. Special reasons are notoriously difficult to plead and the standard of proof is exceptionally high.

We also advised members on a number of criminal queries which did not amount to police involvement but which the member required information on such as lost money on a pyramid scheme; child protection issues; and publication of alleged offences in the media.

Conveyancing: a reduced-price conveyancing service was provided to members.

Advice Service: Legal advice was provided to individual members on a range of matters including family law and property matters. Surgeries were operated from Derry, Coleraine, Ballymena, Portadown, Omagh and Newry to enable members from outside the Greater Belfast area to access personal injury and other legal services.

Training & events: Solicitors from the ER and PI Departments act as tutors on courses organised by UNISON and provide speakers and information material for union seminars and events, including attendance at branch meetings to discuss particular aspects of union legal services.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

To keep our clients and communities safe, and in line with official advice, Thompsons Solicitors has closed our physical offices until further notice. We are working hard to minimise disruption, with the vast majority of staff working from home. You can learn more about how we're continuing to support our clients at www.thompsons.law/news/news-releases/our-firm-news/thompsons-solicitors-coronavirus-covid-19-update

If you have experienced symptoms, or been diagnosed with coronavirus (COVID-19) following a visit to one of our offices, please contact coronavirus@thompsons.law.co.uk so we can take further appropriate precautions to help stop the spread of the virus.

You can sign up to receive our regular email bulletins to keep you informed of relevant legal and political developments relating to coronavirus (COVID-19) www.thompsons.law/news/newsletters/newsletter-subscription

Objective 2

Bargaining &
Bargaining for
equality

Negotiating &
bargaining on behalf
of members, &
promoting equality



Our bargaining and equality priorities

No going back to normal: Since last Regional Council, the NI Executive and NI Assembly has been re-established and a power sharing devolved government is now in situ. The response to the pandemic has highlighted the value of key workers, mostly women. Many of them are UNISON's core membership. Securing their rights and pay justice is a bargaining priority for us. UNISON has launched its 'No going back to normal' campaign and the campaign priorities must be reflected in our bargaining agenda at all levels.

One of the main adverse impacts of the public service response to the pandemic has been the tendency of Government Departments and most employers to side-step their responsibilities to equality screen and impact assess proposed changes and new policies. We have challenged the downgrading of the work of equality and human rights units in both health and education. This has resulted in UNISON challenging breaches of Section 75 of the NI Act 1998. We have done so in co-ordination with the Equality Coalition.

The production of key research on the impact of Covid on women in general and women workers is now a central element of our regional bargaining agenda.

Widening inequality for our members, as a result of low pay; deepening poverty; absence of workers' rights, particularly in the private sector; institutional discrimination and the impact of disturbing changes in immigration rules are all issues for both the bargaining agenda and our direct policy engagement with Government.

Key bargaining demands include:

- a reversal of the neglect of social care workers, mostly women;
- urgent action on the provision on cost of childcare;
- effective policies and procedures on women's rights issues including menopause, abortion, equal pay and the gender pay gap;

- enhanced protection for our black and migrant workers during the pandemic and against the adverse impact of immigration rules and EU exit;
- enhanced training for staff at all levels challenging racism, misogyny, homophobia, and sectarianism;
- implementation of Disability Action Plans across the public sector in the key areas of selection, recruitment and training;
- implementation of the commitments in 'New Decade, New Approach' on the living wage and action to promote rights and eliminate discrimination.



Historic strike in health and social services:

Towards the end of 2019, cuts in budgets, decline and withdrawal of services and impact on the workforce, all converged to maintain a substantial level of uncertainty. We were also facing the impact of the delay in completing the Agenda for Change Refresh across the HSC.

Balloting commenced on October 21st 2019 and a strong mandate emerged from all directly employed health staff in Trusts and arms-length bodies. They were no longer prepared to accept that the absence of devolved power sharing continued to restrict movement on pay terms and conditions for our health & social care members.

During the balloting period we were negotiating with the Department and all Trusts to significantly reduce and eventually end the huge expenditure on agency cover. This was and remains a substantial part of our industrial action and campaigning to reinstate safe staffing levels based on a sustainable and stable permanent workforce.

We now know that within domiciliary care there is a privatisation agenda under consideration in the Department. Our bargaining, public policy and campaign strategies are interlinked and require us to challenge all of this at Government, public body and individual employer levels.

Industrial action commenced in November 2019 and proved highly successful in restoring pay parity with NHS England and securing the remaining two years of Agenda for Change pay uplift. Our campaign was devised to apply maximum pressure on the capacity of management in Trusts and arms-length bodies to manage the service. Our branches devised strategically effective forms of industrial action from November to January. Our industrial action committee worked tirelessly to minimise the impact on service users and patients while maintaining strong pressure on the employers and the department. Both maintained that the absence of an Executive and the Health Minister prevented resolution of the dispute.

At the same time, DoH officials and employers discussed levels of funding to make a pay parity claim. At no time then or now did UNISON accept this argument and that pay parity should be withheld. The industrial action strategy was accompanied by political action/strategy which brought leaders of all political parties to fully endorse the call for the restoration of pay parity. The difference between them and us was they believed they needed an Executive to do this while we argued the money was sitting in the Westminster Treasury.



A breakthrough came when the political system, under pressure from the new Secretary of State for NI, brought politicians back to the table to discuss restoration of power sharing and devolved government.

Public support for our industrial action and UNISON's success in getting all political leaders to sign an agreed letter, was instrumental in bringing all main parties back to the table.

In early 2020 the Executive was reformed, and a new Health Minister established. Negotiations to restore pay parity were underway and on 15 January 2020 a framework agreement was proposed. An extensive ballot of all health unions secured acceptance from HSC staff.

UNISON's members played the leading role in achieving a successful outcome. Indeed, it can be said that we have secured a place in history as it is generally accepted that our dispute was the catalyst in restoring devolved government.

Key priorities across sectors: Our key priority in 2020 continues to be one of responding to significant developments in the health, education, community and voluntary sectors.

We continue to challenge the behaviour of the Department of Health which is driving forward *Delivering Together* by ignoring the commitment to co-design and co-delivery. Strategic and policy discussions continue to take place which have transformational impact on health services ignoring the fact that transformation only succeeds with the co-operation of staff. Monitoring developments and ensuring accountability and transparency has significantly increased the workload of UNISON staff and activists.

Response to the pandemic: All of this has taken place in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic which has severely challenged the capacity of the health service to meet the needs of the people. Since March 2020 services have had to be reconfigured and, in many instances, severely curtailed or suspended.

The challenges this has presented for staff has been immense. Coping with health and safety needs, medical and social care has seen the agendas of all our bargaining structures – at regional, Trust and workforce level – dominated by issues of availability of PPE and testing.

Working practices of workers have been altered and huge number of issues to do with a broad range of terms and conditions have been on every agenda of every meeting. For months now we have worked our way through public health guidance to ensure health workers rights are fully protected.

Additionally, UNISON regional staff and lay members worked closely together to highlight serious problems across the social care sector in domiciliary care and nursing homes. We intervened early in the surge period with the PHA and the RQIA on the absence of their interventions. UNISON was instrumental in securing guaranteed pay during the first surge for domiciliary care and an improvement in sick pay from statutory to occupational earnings. The work we did is highlighted in the campaign section of this report.

We are now grappling with the restart strategy across the health service, winter pressures and an emerging second surge of the Covid pandemic. All our bargaining structures are now geared up for interventions at regional, local and workplace level to meet this head on.



Attempts to centralise governance and management of the health service in the hands of the senior civil service team have been challenged and are proving to be inadequate. UNISON is leading interventions at a bargaining and policy level to reinstate and maintain direct engagement of health staff in the implementation of Restart.

In Education, the closure of schools during the first surge presented bargaining challenges around the protection of employment rights for workers. During the summer we engaged vigorously together with teaching unions in a challenge to the Department of Education's rushed plans.

We worked jointly with other education unions throughout the summer on implementing the development of guidance from the Department of Education and the Education Authority.

Since schools reopened, we have worked closely with our lay bargaining team to protect and secure employment rights and health and safety standards for our members who work as classroom assistants, and in school transport, cleaning, catering, estates and youth services.

During all of this work we successfully balloted our members on NJC pay terms and conditions on the 2020/2021 pay award.

Additionally, we continued to ensure local and regional negotiating bodies reflect UNISON's bargaining priorities, including:

- bargaining for recognition agreements;
- the new 'One Team, 2K' pay campaign in health;
- implementation of the NJC pay award;
- challenge the reduction in the pay of special needs staff by changing contracts;
- working with the Education Authority to implement a new policy on menopause (a result of bringing campaigning issues to the bargaining table);
- equality bargaining with all employers – with a priority on support for front line workers in health and education grappling with childcare issues. This is now a major issue across all bargaining structures, and we are closely co-ordinating our interventions with employers with our campaigning work with providers and the political system;
- challenging privatisation across all sectors;
- successfully pursuing up-banding for Trust health staff;
- successfully securing permanent contracts for temporary staff in some health Trusts;
- pursuing the demand for a real living wage across all sectors;
- challenging cuts to government funding to the community and voluntary sector by applying S75 to cuts;
- assessing the impact of EU Exit on the workforce and services;

- demanding resources for workforce planning and career pathways. This was a key issue in our industrial action and we now have a commitment to drafting of legislation for safe staffing; Work is now underway with employers and the Department to fill all vacancies and reduce agency spend;
- pursuing ethical procurement, including the supply chain, in health and education;
- challenging the Education Authority on their failure to auto-enrol at the appropriate date thousands of workers in the NILGOSC pension scheme;
- continuing participation in the new pension schemes governance bodies (both NILGOSC and HSC) and securing ongoing training for new lay trustees and pension board members.

■ Challenging privatisation in health and education

Keeping support services in-house: In-patient and client support services - we are pursuing implementation of commitments to fill vacancies across all sectors of the workforce where an unacceptable reliance on agency staff is costing millions of the health budget.

We are examining in great detail agency spending and are determined to significantly reduce and eliminate where we can the reliance on agencies to provide staff. We have commenced filling permanent posts with temporary workers in the Belfast Trust.

Protecting social care: We are clear that social care must be returned in-house. For several years UNISON has been involved in engagement at the policy level and at the bargaining tables across the Trusts on the drive towards a new model of domiciliary care.

The policy issues we are challenging on are covered in Section 3 of the report. Our work at Trust level continues to focus on:

- engagement with procurement officers on the monitoring of outsourced provision;
- challenging the use of zero-hour contracts, agency and temporary staff.

We have called upon the Minister to establish a bargaining forum which will bring reluctant private provider employers into direct engagement with us.

On the in-house side, we have forced all Trusts to maintain the direct workforce at current

levels with a view to restoring in-house delivery. Where permanent posts in direct provision are available, UNISON supports the movement of staff from the independent sector into these jobs.



Private medicine: We continue to challenge the increased use of private medicine and have now raised our concern at the extension of contracts with private sector care providers into the field of mental health and on the use of agencies and locums which is draining resources from the service.

Education: Discussions with the Department of Education on transformation have stalled. We remain on full alert as privatisation is a very real threat in education and the EA budget deficit has widened.

In 2020 our challenge to voluntary grammar schools is focusing on NJC pay. We are also keeping a close eye on the capacity of EA support services to be maintained during the Covid pandemic.

■ Pay campaigns in health & education

Health - Agenda for Change 'Pay Max'/Refresh:

As part of our 'AFC Pay Max'/Refresh strategy, negotiations are ongoing with NHS employers in NI on the up-banding of staff from Band 1 to Band 2 on the Agenda for Change pay scales. In Belfast Health Trust, 16 support service job descriptions including those for portering and estates workers have been submitted for job evaluation.

We secured retrospective payments of accrued annual leave entitlement for domiciliary care workers in the Western Health Trust and for domestic service workers and other support workers in Belfast Health Trust. UNISON is now seeking retrospective payments for the failure of health Trusts' to calculate sick pay entitlement in accordance with Agenda for Change for domiciliary care and other support service staff.

UNISON has been successful in resolving the long-running Agenda for Change Job Evaluation dispute with the NI Ambulance Service. This resulted in EMTs moving from a Band 4 to a Band 5 and Paramedics, including RRV Paramedics, moving from a Band 5 to Band 6 with pay backdated to 1st January 2017.

To mitigate the financial hardship for our members working in domiciliary care during the height of the pandemic, UNISON secured agreement from the NI Social Care Council (NISCC) to defer registration renewal fees for registrants until October.



UNISON secured the transfer of trade union recognition for our members with Healthcare Ireland Ltd following the takeover of several homes from Four Seasons Healthcare.

We ensured that staff transferring from Four Seasons to Healthcare Ireland had their terms and conditions of employment protected under TUPE regulations.



NHS Pensions: There are currently consultations being carried out in NI, England and Wales on reforms to the public sector pension scheme following the McCloud judgement where, in December 2018, the Court of Appeal ruled that the 2015 pension scheme reforms were unlawful on the grounds of age discrimination.

A briefing was carried out for health branches in September 2020 by UNISON Pensions Officers Colm Porter and Alan Fox, on each of the schemes and the remedies proposed in the consultation. The briefing gave a background to the McCloud ruling, the former and current pensions schemes, and the remedies proposed, in order to assist with responses to the consultation.

Education and Local Government Pay: We undertook a ballot of our members in Education and Local Government on the employers pay offer of an increase of 2.75% on all NJC pay points from 1st April 2020 and an increase of one day to the minimal annual leave entitlement. The majority of members balloted voted to accept the pay offer.

The existing commitment by the EA to review pay in education has stalled. However, we anticipate discussions will recommence before the end of 2020.

■ Developing recognition and bargaining

We are the lead union in health and social care bargaining and the joint lead in education. The range of formal NI-wide bargaining structures covers the majority of our membership in health, social care, education and higher education. We also have a range of bargaining structures with individual employers, but significant sectors are still without recognition or central bargaining.



As part of the review of democratic participation, we are analysing more than 900 employers in the private sector, the public sector (outside health & education), and the community & voluntary sectors to determine more effective strategies to secure recognition and bargaining rights. It will lead to reconfiguration at branch and regional level.

Bargaining for recognition agreements: We are exerting pressure on the health service in particular, to include trade union recognition as a criterion in the award of contracts. However, given that formal recognition flows from having the proper membership density, it is a priority for all branches to maximise recruitment in these areas in 2020/21.

This is being closely monitored by the service groups and Regional Committee.

We reported last year on our application to the Industrial Court to renew recognition with Arjo Huntley. Discussions have been held with Arjo on Covid issues and the company's surge plans.

Strengthening our bargaining structures inside UNISON and at employer level: Our response to the pandemic has brought into sharp relief the high levels of commitment and competency of UNISON lay negotiators and has firmly embedded the relationship between the staff and lay negotiating team. All our bargainers have faced an increased workload and much of our bargaining capacity has been maintained by their willingness to provide cover for each other.

A planned review of the Nurses Forum was postponed due to the pandemic. However, Forum members and AOs are working on new recruitment initiatives. Another new initiative has commenced with the creation of a Forum for our Social Worker members. This is a slow process given the pandemic, but we are proceeding with virtual briefings.

Representation NMC, NISCC hearings and Professional Conduct Hearings: Following the agreement of a new HQ protocol for the oversight of our NMC casework, we continue to use our small panel of external experts in co-ordination with the HQ unit.

Further & Higher Education, Libraries & Youth Justice

■ Non-Teaching Staffs Negotiating Council (NTSNC)

In December 2019, Phase 1 of pay negotiations concluded with the further & higher education colleges. We were successful in achieving regional pay for non-teaching staff based on NJC pay awards. We are now working on Phase 2 of the pay negotiations which involves the assimilation of non-teaching staff grades onto the NJC pay scales.

Discussions have been ongoing this year to agree the 2nd phase of the year 2 NJC pay agreement for the 2019 grading review. We

would expect these discussions to be completed soon and members consulted with the final outcome.

Employers have accepted the NJC pay award for 2020/2021 and this will be implemented to all staff when agreement has been reached with the grading review. We will serve a comparable pay claim for our outsourced members employed by a number of contractors including Noonan, Grahams and Mount Charles.

■ Higher Education

University directly employed staff: Some directly employed UNISON members in UU were furloughed on 100% pay, but most were able to work from home. Negotiations continue to secure new contracts for staff in the UU NMC Competence Test Centre.

The University is currently working on a structural review for all sections of the estates department. UNISON participated in the review process which is now nearing completion. UNISON provided input on an Equality Impact Assessment of the proposed relocation of the School of Health Science. Consultation on the EQIA and the wider location proposals will open in October.

Noonan and Mount Charles: This has been a particularly difficult year for staff working for Noonan and Mount Charles across the Ulster University campus. The majority of the staff have been furloughed since the end of March, with only security officers and some cleaning staff remaining on site. Mount

Charles has a reduced service on the Coleraine and Jordanstown campuses with 90% of the workforce going through the redundancy process.



Noonan have been able to bring back the majority of their staff. However, there are still workers remaining on furlough. UNISON continues to challenge the payment of SSP for workers who are off with Covid-19.

UU Students Union: The UU Students Union has closed their facilities across all campuses. UNISON challenged the decision, but redundancies have proceeded with staff receiving a 13% package enhancement.

■ The NI Library Authority

UNISON have entered into negotiations with Libraries NI to agree a process for job evaluation for library branch managers and assimilation onto NJC pay scales. We are currently in discussions with the Authority working on organisational restructuring and

new posts. The NJC pay award has been accepted by the Authority. Work is still ongoing on reducing spinal points and assimilation for staff onto these new points, as happened in the EA.

■ Youth Justice Agency

At an early stage in the pandemic we challenged the employer on the provision of guidance and PPE. We are in negotiations with the Youth Justice Agency for staff working in Rathgael to have weekend pay

enhancements included in annual leave entitlement. The loss of weekend allowances by staff who had their rosters changed is now being taken forward as a grievance.

■ Local Government

We have a minority membership in Local Government given that what would be core functions in GB are carried out by the health and social services system, the Education Authority, the NI Housing Executive and a range of Government departments. UNISON has concluded negotiations with Mid & East Antrim Council on the standardisation and

harmonisation of the terms and conditions of employment of staff from the 3 legacy councils that now comprise the Council. Following months of negotiations, we ensured that staff remained protected on the NJC Greenbook terms and conditions of employment.

Private Sector

Recognition: Following months of negotiation, UNISON secured voluntary trade union recognition with Arjo UK which is one of the leading suppliers of beds and equipment to the NHS. Joint negotiating meetings have been scheduled for the months ahead to address our members' key issues. We have secured a transfer of recognition rights from Four Seasons to Homecare Ireland Ltd. We have a series of recognition claims for both voluntary and statutory recognition across private sector residential homes and homecare employers.

Pay claims: We have submitted pay claims for a 10% increase on all salary points and allowances on behalf of our members working for Noonan and Mount Charles on University of Ulster Campuses. We are currently consulting with our members at Kilmorey Care on the employer's recent annual pay offer to staff which includes a 6.5% increase on the salaries of care assistants working in the nursing homes.

Negotiations have commenced with the University of Ulster to require third party private contractors providing support services on UU campuses to pay the real living wage as a minimum and provide full sick pay cover for their staff. Negotiations are continuing with Mount Charles and the UU to avoid any compulsory redundancies and protect our members' jobs.



Community and Voluntary Sectors

The hundreds of very diverse members and employments across the community and voluntary sectors require intensive input to deal with lodging of pay claims, other negotiations, grievances and disciplinaries and in many cases the battle for recognition.

For our members in these sectors we were able to secure full pay protection for staff self-isolating or shielding due to Covid-19 with employers such as Apex Housing, Newington Housing Association, Women's Resource and Development Agency and First Housing Support Services.

Negotiations are ongoing with Apex Housing on increasing sick leave and annual leave entitlement for staff and job evaluation for all support staff and the direct labour staff.

Working with the Simon Community NI, a review of frontline and admin workers' pay

resulted in staff receiving an upgrade to their posts and an average 4% increase in their pay.

A survey on the impact of Covid has been distributed to all C&V members by email. Our campaign of opposition against cuts to the Supporting People Programme is reported in Section 3.



Objective 3

Campaigning,
public policy &
supporting the
Peace Process

Campaigning &
promoting
UNISON on behalf
of members



Why campaign?

All of our work in this section is about advancing the position of our members, their families and their communities. It is led by Regional Secretary, Patricia McKeown on behalf of the Regional Committee and supported by RMT members, Thomas Mahaffy and Anne Speed. The main policy work is carried out by John Patrick Clayton.



As a union everything we do is about creating a better life for our members. Because of our direct involvement with our membership we are acutely aware of the issues which are important to them and their future. The importance of effective campaigning has no better example than the heroic efforts of our members working across the health and social care system in their industrial action.

Their stand in defence of the health service, supported by our work at the bargaining table, in communications and in political lobbying, not only delivered pay parity and a funded plan to address safe staffing, but also directly led to the restoration of devolved Government at Stormont.

The Covid-19 pandemic has taken a major toll on public services that were already under-resourced and understaffed after years of austerity. It has also had a massive social and economic impact on all our communities, with the potential for tens of thousands of redundancies to come. Protecting and building our public services through effective campaigning has never been more important in this climate. Throughout the pandemic we have been campaigning for all our members on the crucial issues of PPE, testing, contact tracing, sick pay and health and safety of our members in the workplace.

In tandem we are pushing Government at all levels to take the actions that are long overdue to deliver fundamental rights in areas such as health, education, social security, income, housing, and childcare.

Regional Committee is aware that much of our detailed work at the negotiating table and in political lobbying can seem remote from the everyday issues which affect our members' lives. However, since the impact of the pandemic there is increasing recognition that these UNISON priorities are fundamental to securing our members rights:

- | | |
|--|--|
| the overall economic situation and the impact of welfare reform | their rights as workers and their jobs and conditions in specific sectors |
| the health and education of their children | reforming our health & social care system to create a public health model which aims to eradicate health inequalities |
| care for older people and their families | mental health care for them and their families – with a particular focus on suicide |
| job opportunities and career development for them and their families | better use of public money to create local jobs |
| better delivery of public services to tackle poverty, ill health unemployment, and lack of skills & qualifications | building human rights and equality to tackle the discrimination they face and targeting social need so that no one gets left behind. |
| working together to build the local movement on peace | protecting our members, their families and communities from the negative effects of exit from the European Union |

Current political context

After over 1000 days without a devolved power-sharing Executive and Assembly in NI, the devolved institutions were finally restored in January 2020.

There is no doubt that the incredible campaign of industrial action by our members across the entire health and social services system at the end of 2019 was a significant factor in getting Stormont back up and running. The huge and sustained public support shown for striking UNISON health and social services workers became a touchstone for the frustration felt across all of NI at the inability of our elected politicians to genuinely share power in the interests of all the people.

Our UNISON health and social services workers managed to achieve something that numerous Secretaries of State and the Irish Government had been unable to achieve over nearly 3 years. Through their industrial action, they forced all the political parties to jointly agree to support their fair and just demands for pay parity and safe staffing levels.

With the Executive and Assembly restored, our focus has turned to demanding that our Government genuinely shares power this time within a framework of equality and human rights for all.

The **'New Decade, New Approach'** agreement, under which Stormont has returned, sets out a range of actions in a range of areas where UNISON has been actively campaigning.

Over the last 3 years we have worked closely with our allies across civic society in NI to demand real social dialogue and engagement on all the major issues affecting our members, their families and their communities. We will accept nothing less and will hold our new Executive to account against these standards.

Since the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have sought to engage with all Executive Ministers on two key priorities; keeping the public safe and keeping our members safe to care for them.

We have met with nearly all Executive Ministers and Departments to discuss their responses to the pandemic and the actions required to develop a genuine public health model across Government. We have stressed the need for the entire Executive to work together in meeting these challenges.

As a union that pioneered partnership working across the health service, we stand ready to work constructively with Government in order to find the best solutions that will protect the public and our members.



We publicly challenged the Executive on the speed and trajectory of the strategy in dealing with the pandemic in the spring and early summer, where measures were not taken early enough to protect both the most vulnerable in our care homes and the workforce.

We have made it clear, however, that a full public inquiry into the handling of Covid-19 within our care homes is required, with particular reference to the very high number of deaths of residents that has occurred during the course of the pandemic.

In education, we have fought to ensure that children and young people and our members can return to school after lockdown in a safe way. The concerns of our members have not always been listened to or acted upon quickly enough, but without our direct interventions with the Education Ministers and EA, many measures put in place to ensure health and safety and mitigate the risk of Covid-19 would not be in place.

Dealing with the significant funding crisis in education remains a key priority. Given the impact that Covid-19 will have on public health and poverty levels, we have launched a campaign, which will be showcased at Regional Council, demanding the universal provision of free school meals for all children.

The shadow of exiting the EU continues to hang over us. Whilst the UK exited the EU in January with a Withdrawal Agreement that contained a Protocol on NI that minimised some of the issues exiting the EU presents, we are growing increasingly concerned by attempts by Boris Johnson and his Government to undermine and disappaly that Protocol.

The chances of a Future Relationship agreement being reached between the EU-UK by 31st December appear slim. We continue to work with our allies across civic society to publicly campaign against the risks that exiting the EU presents to the Good Friday Agreement and our Peace Process.

Countering the potential negative impacts that exiting the EU will have on our members in NI, their families, communities and the wider peace process will remain a key priority, regardless of whatever developments occur over the coming weeks.

In conjunction with ICTU, and alongside our allies in the rights and equality sector in NI, we successfully worked to influence local political parties, the Irish Government, the EU and allies in the US Congress in order to ensure that protection of the Good Friday Agreement

remains a priority issue within ongoing negotiations.

Across the public service, budgets remain in severe difficulty and ultimately it is our members and the public that will bear the harshest impact of any return to austerity measures as a result of Covid-19. For this reason, we continue to press all parties to take responsibility.

We continue to press for a strong focus on promoting and protecting our members' rights.

Our priorities with Government and employers continue to be for:

- a real Living Wage for all and an early and significant pay award for NHS workers;
- implementation of the commitments made in the 'New Decade, New Approach' agreement on the real Living Wage and zero-hours contracts;
- mainstreaming equality and human rights into public sector procurement and employment processes;
- gaining access for our members to adequate, affordable childcare and agreements to protect women's health;
- challenging poverty and inequality; and
- providing our members with support to access existing entitlement to the benefits system while at the same time reversing the discriminatory changes now in place.

We continue to prioritise the demand for an inclusive, enforceable Bill of Rights for NI. As we stare into the abyss of EU exit it is needed more than ever.



■ The impact of exiting the EU

The impact of EU exit will be felt throughout the membership. The work needed to secure protection for the Peace Agreement and our members' rights and livelihoods is extensive. Consequently, throughout the past year members of the UNISON NI team have:

- liaised closely with the General Secretary and the HQ team and ensured that the protection of the Good Friday Agreement and prevention of a hard border is a priority across the whole union;
- produced extensive impact analyses;
- engaged with the UK and Irish Governments, the EU institutions, UK political parties, all local political parties, US political representatives and sought clear commitments from the British Labour Party;
- sponsored and participated in special conferences and seminars;
- worked closely with our allies in ICTU and the equality and human rights sector.

The new Withdrawal Agreement reached between the EU and Boris Johnson's Government includes the 'frontstop' protocol for NI. NI alone now within the UK is aligned to the EU customs territory in order to keep an open border on the island of Ireland. NI will also remain aligned to the EU single market for goods. The Protocol no longer states a desire that it only apply temporarily, instead assuming that this may well be a permanent arrangement for NI.



This raised serious concerns about the movement of goods between NI and GB. Goods moving from GB into NI may be subject to checks and controls, particularly products of an animal origin.

Potentially tariffs may be applied to goods moving from Britain to NI if they are considered to be at risk of entering the Republic of Ireland, rather than staying in NI.

Revised Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland

Objectives of the Protocol
The revised Protocol provides a legally operational solution in order to:
✓ Avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland
✓ Protect the all-island economy and the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement in all its dimensions
✓ Safeguard the integrity of the Single Market
✓ Ensure that Northern Ireland remains in the UK's customs territory and benefits from participation in the UK's independent trade policy

The Protocol responds to the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland with the aim of protecting peace and stability.

The arrangements within the Protocol relating to trade are subject to ongoing 'democratic consent' by the NI Assembly. The Assembly will vote for the first time on whether it wishes for the arrangements set out in the Protocol to be maintained 4 years after the end of the transition period (end of 2024 at earliest).

If MLAs consent via a 'cross-community' vote, then the arrangements continue for another 8 years. If it is a simple majority vote in favour, the arrangements continue for another 4 years. If they vote to opt-out of the arrangements, then they no longer apply after 2 years. It should be noted that support for the Protocol amongst political parties in NI is extremely low. In January, the Assembly overwhelmingly refused to give its consent to the Withdrawal Agreement.

The original 'backstop' agreed by Theresa May's Government included some limited protections for workers' rights, providing that the UK could not diverge below a common floor of standards that exist at the end of the transition period. This has been stripped from the new agreement.

A key ongoing priority will be to campaign to ensure that our devolved Assembly and Executive both retains the power to continue to legislate in line with improving standards at the EU level and does so.

Securing protections for the rights of our members, their families and the wider community has been a key priority for us from the outset. UNISON is clear that rights must not only be protected as they stand, but must also develop over time in line with progressive changes at the EU level.

EU law underpins a range of key workers' rights and obligations placed on employers. These cover areas including employment rights, equality, and health and safety laws. Outside of the EU, future Governments could try to remove key rights and obligations currently required by EU membership. The UK will no longer be required to keep pace with rights at EU level.

Within the NI Protocol, the UK committed to the non-diminution of some rights contained within the GFA as a result of Brexit and the establishment of a 'Dedicated Mechanism' comprised of the NI Human Rights Commission and NI Equality Commission.

Whilst the UK has passed the legislation required to establish the dedicated mechanism, it remains to be seen if the Commissions will receive adequate resources to discharge their functions, and sufficient powers to enforce. Concerns are growing that the dedicated mechanism is already being undermined by the introduction of the UK Internal Market Bill.

We continue to call for the introduction of a Bill of Rights for NI that could protect rights based on EU law moving into the future.

Too many have reduced the impact of the UK exit from the EU on NI to questions of how goods will move across the border, North and South, when in reality the UK exiting the EU presents much more serious and grave issues:

- negatively affecting the peace process;
- massively interfering in the day-to-day lives of our members, their families and their communities; and
- interfering in the delivery of public services.

Exiting the EU threatens the key aspects of the Peace Agreement relating to equality of citizenship and parity of esteem, creating borders and tensions between communities that the Good Friday Agreement was meant to bring down.



We will continue to work with colleagues across UNISON and wider civil society to protect the rights of British and Irish citizens under the Common Travel Area.

Brandon Lewis, the Northern Ireland secretary, admitted that the attempts to unilaterally interpret rules to avoid a hard border in Ireland “break international law”, but “in a very specific and limited way”.

In negotiating the future relationship, it is clear that the UK is both seeking to diverge from EU rights and standards in relation to workers' rights and is refusing to be bound within any new agreement to remain within the European Convention on Human Rights. Any attempt by the UK Government to repeal or replace the Human Rights Act 1998 or leave the European Convention on Human Rights would breach the terms of the Good Friday Agreement and would represent a massive blow to the peace process. This will be strongly opposed.

Internal Market Bill: The attack on the Good Friday Agreement and Human Rights Act has already begun through the Internal Market Bill recently presented at Westminster. This Bill seeks to unilaterally override the Protocol, an Act that the UK Government openly admits will breach international law. However even setting aside these parts, the Bill significantly and negatively impacts devolution across the UK, particularly for NI.

The provisions of the Bill will undermine the ability of devolved power-sharing Government in NI to legislate independently and set its own policy direction relating to the particular circumstances of NI, a fundamental outworking of the Good Friday Agreement.

We are genuinely concerned that in NI these powers could be used to impede the development of both employment laws and equality and anti-discrimination laws, which are devolved to Stormont. We are also concerned that they will interfere with the commitment made under the Ireland/NI Protocol on the non-diminution of rights.

The UK Government is seeking to unilaterally override parts of the Protocol in relation to the movement of goods from NI to GB, breaching an international agreement it entered into and undermining the Protocol as a whole through its actions. This raises once again the possibility for border checks and controls to be placed on the island of Ireland.

In addition, the Bill expressly seeks to limit the application of the Human Rights Act 1998 in this scenario. To undermine the Human Rights Act in this way is particularly troubling, as the UK Government is required under the GFA to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights in domestic law, including direct access to the courts and remedies for breach of the Convention. This amendment would regress the incorporation of the ECHR into domestic law, in contravention of the GFA, and contradicts the commitment made under the Ireland/NI Protocol on the non-diminution of rights.

UNISON has led a wide range of civil society groups in NI in meeting with officials from the UK Government and publicly registered our strong protest at the terms of the Bill. We will continue to oppose the Bill and seek its removal.

Protecting the Common Travel Area: Free movement of people as a right under EU law is of critical importance to UNISON members, their families and the communities they live in, particularly those living in border areas.

UNISON members living in the Republic of Ireland cross the border on a regular basis to work in NI.

With the right to freedom of movement set to end, the Common Travel Area (CTA) has frequently been presented as a solution to maintaining freedom of movement for Irish and British citizens across these islands and to sustain rights associated with this, including the right to work and access public services. However, concerns have been expressed by both the NI Human Rights Commission and the Irish Human Rights Commission that the CTA is effectively written in sand, open to change and amendment, particularly with the UK outside of the EU.

Whilst the UK and Irish Governments have signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the CTA this is not legally binding and stronger action is required.

We have been campaigning for an international legally binding treaty between the UK and Ireland to fully clarify the rights of British and Irish citizens under the CTA; and pressing for legislative change that recognises the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement in relation to the right to identify as an Irish citizen in NI.



Alongside our allies in CAJ, we successfully engaged with politicians from a range of parties at Westminster to have amendments debated on the Immigration and Social Security Coordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill relating to the rights protected under the Common Travel Area.

This Bill will end the EU right to freedom of movement within the UK, but provides Irish citizens with a standalone right to enter and reside in the UK. Whilst Irish citizens can apply for settled status (see below) to protect their rights under the Withdrawal Agreement, the UK Government has repeatedly relied on the Common Travel Area provisions as a reason why they do not need to do so.

Our amendment sought that the Government clearly identify the differences between the rights of the Common Travel Area and the rights under the Settled Status scheme, so Irish citizens could make an informed decision on whether to apply for this scheme or not. The Bill is continuing through Parliament.

In addition, as a result of the Emma De Souza case, the UK Government has now moved to allow Irish and British citizens access to the settled status scheme, though this appears limited to allow their non-EU/EEA family members to have access to the scheme. We are continuing to assess the implications of this change for our current members.

Protecting migrant workers: The process of migrant workers registering to remain in the UK through the EU Settlement Scheme has already begun, with the scheme open until 30th June 2021. Whilst the Scheme was initially proposed to cost £65 pounds per person, per application, we successfully secured agreement that employers would cover the cost of the pilot programme in NI. However, the UK Government announced that it would scrap the fees entirely following sustained pressure from the 3million campaign and UNISON.

We have thousands of migrant worker members in NI who make a vital contribution to the delivery of public services. To protect them and their families we are working with CAJ and the Migrant Centre. We continue to support branches in encouraging our members to apply for their settled status without delay.

Frontier workers: Over the last year we have campaigned for a clear scheme to be put in place for cross-border 'frontier' workers who

are not covered by the Settlement Scheme, as they reside in the Republic of Ireland but work in NI.

The Withdrawal Agreement includes frontier workers within its provisions on citizens' rights. Details of a separate scheme recognising their status have now been published following our repeated interventions. These workers will have to apply for a permit that recognises their right to work in the UK. We understand that the application process will be free and will open in January 2021.

Whilst we are still assessing the scheme alongside CAJ and the Migrant Centre, we are immediately concerned by the short window in which applications will have to be made (it will be mandatory to have such a permit by 1st July 2021). In addition, there is once again confusion in relation to the position of Irish citizens, with the UK Government stating that they may apply for a permit, but are not required to do so.

Rising racism: We remain alarmed to see the levels of racism, hatred and xenophobia that have grown to characterise the debate on exiting the EU. We are concerned about the potential for racial profiling to occur as freedom of movement ends.



The UK Government has previously suggested that checks on a person's immigration status will occur away from the land border on the island of Ireland, instead taking place when a person accesses public services or employment. We will oppose any suggestion of a 'hostile environment' approach to immigration checks being put in place and of workers being required to enforce it.

In addition, the UK Home Secretary has suggested that there may be immigration checks on journeys across the Irish Sea.

We believe that the proposed future immigration framework for the UK is flawed and will only exacerbate the difficulties that already exist in recruiting workers for our public services.

The proposed salary threshold is completely unrealistic in NI, in particular given the already low rates of pay experienced by workers across the public sector and by those working in private companies providing public services.

Securing support within the United States for protecting the peace process: We believe that the hard line approach by Boris Johnson and the UK Government to exiting the EU is motivated by ambition to secure a de-regulated free trade deal for the UK with the United States.

UNISON has been very clear that we will not accept any attempt to put our NHS up for sale nor will we allow a free trade deal that leads to major de-regulation of workers' rights or product standards. Of equal concern to us is the idea that the US and UK would strike a trade deal which compromises the Good Friday Agreement.

In response to this threat, we have continued to engage with US political leaders via our unique consortium of civic and business representatives from NI.

In March, we attended the St Patrick's events in Washington and again met with political leaders from both the US House of Representatives and Senate, gave evidence to the Ad Hoc Committee on Protecting the Good Friday Agreement, and met with both the Irish and British Government teams in Washington. We have continued to brief US political representatives during the lockdown and are influencing their responses to the Internal Market Bill.

The UK Government continues to underestimate the strength of support in the US for our Peace Agreement from both parties. US Congressional leaders, including Speaker Nancy Pelosi, have been clear that they will not allow a free trade deal with the UK that compromises the Good Friday Agreement. She said:

"Whatever form it takes, Brexit cannot be allowed to imperil the Good Friday Agreement, including the stability brought by the invisible and frictionless border between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland...If the UK violates that international treaty and Brexit undermines the Good Friday accord, there will be absolutely no chance of a US-UK trade agreement passing the Congress...The Good Friday Agreement is treasured by the American people and will be proudly defended in the United States Congress."

These comments have been reiterated since the introduction of the Internal Market Bill. The US President can talk about striking free trade deals with the UK all he wants; the reality is that it is Congress, not the President, which approves these agreements.



Harry Hamilton, UNISON with Nancy Pelosi at the Ireland Fund event, Washington 2020.

In any event, the new US Special Envoy to NI (former White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney) has indicated that the US will not seek a trade deal where a border is reinstated on the island of Ireland, and the US Trade Representative has accepted that any trade deal which puts up borders will not pass Congress.

■ Economic strategy

As we reported last year, the NI economy continues to be the weakest across these islands. Even before Covid-19, NI had the highest rates of economic inactivity, with increasing numbers of workers employed on a temporary or part-time basis.

In the second quarter of 2020 (the period which included the 'lockdown' measures against Covid-19 from start to finish), the NI economy experienced its largest ever quarterly decrease in production and services. Record redundancies were proposed by employers in June and July, with the number of confirmed redundancies over the last 12 months more than double the previous year.

The numbers of welfare claimants across all four months from May – August had returned to levels not seen since 2012/13, with the unemployment rate increasing significantly over the last quarter. Amongst those employed, almost two-fifths were working fewer hours, with half of those workers away from work they expected to return to.

Our fear is that this is just the beginning of mass redundancies right across all sectors of the economy, as the financial supports offered during the early stages of the pandemic begin to decline.

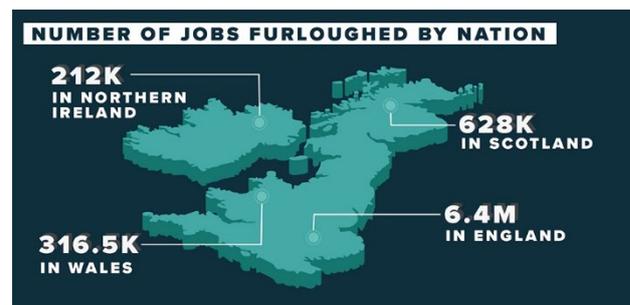
We are continuing to work on the UNISON 'No going back to normal' campaign and the ICTU campaign to ensure that there is no return to the social and economic conditions that existed in NI pre Covid-19. A new deal for our society is required to improve the social and economic outcomes of all and avert a return to the damaging austerity policies of the past.

In addition to the devastating impact Covid-19 will have, the local economy faces an extremely uncertain future due to exiting the EU, particularly given the receding chances of an EU-UK Future relationship agreement being concluded before the end of the transition period.

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme: In March, the UK Chancellor announced a Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme as the lockdown restrictions began.

This was designed to cover 80% of wages for those unable to work due to the restrictions, in an effort to avoid mass redundancies. From July, the scheme was changed to allow employers to claim for unworked hours whilst bringing employees back to work on a part-time basis and the scheme closed to new applicants. The level of wages the Government subsidises also began to taper off from September (70% in September, falling to 60% in October). The Scheme will close on 31st October.

As part of our Bargaining strategy in dealing with the pandemic, we have been engaged in ensuring that workers who can be furloughed are where it is necessary to protect their jobs or to avoid their employers placing them on the bare minimum of sick pay for extended periods. We also have been seeking to ensure that employers paid the remainder of normal pay, above the 80% that was being paid by the UK Government.



The UK Chancellor has announced a replacement Job Support Scheme for a 6 month period from 1st November, where the Government will make contributions to the wages of workers on reduced hours. The worker will need to work at least one-third of their normal hours, which the employer will pay them for. The remaining two-thirds of their pay will be paid by the UK Government (one-third) and their employer (one-third). The Government contribution is capped at £697.92. This new Scheme is much less generous than the Job Retention Scheme.

Whilst a 'cliff-edge' scenario of the complete withdrawal of supports has been avoided (as sought by ICTU) the Chancellor has not continued supports at the same level, despite the re-introduction of restrictions over winter

to deal with Covid-19. It is clear that there will be significant redundancies across the economy over the coming months.

Budget and public finances: Political parties signed up to the 'New Decade, New Approach' document and reformed the institutions prior to knowing the exact financial package that would be offered by the UK Government to support its implementation (unlike UNISON who demanded to see the money before we suspended the strike!)

Immediately there has been concern that the levels of funding coming to NI will not be sufficient. The extra £2 billion announced by the UK Government included £1 billion in Barnett consequential that likely would have come to NI anyway. The further £1 billion is earmarked for one-off expenditure, including capital projects and to fund the Agenda for Change pay refresh for health workers.

£240 million of the DUP Confidence and Supply agreement funding has been returned. The NI Affairs Committee recently recommended that the Government set out a long-term financial plan for its implementation.

The Department of Finance forecasted a budget shortfall of £600 million for 2020/21. Across Government Departments it is now becoming clear just how deep austerity has bitten. A one-year budget was set in March 2020 in the hope that the subsequent upcoming Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) allocation would improve the financial picture and allow the Executive to implement a multi-year resource budget for public services in 2021.

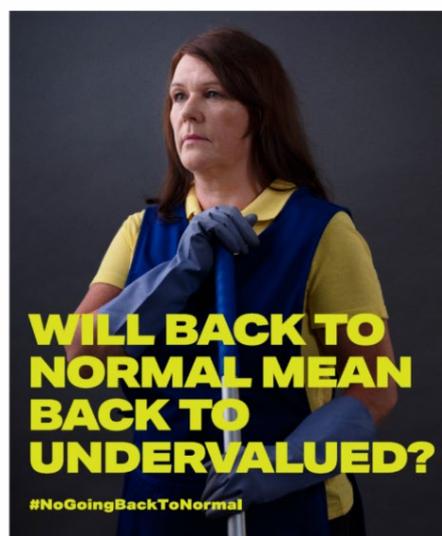
This budget itself identified that the NI block grant in real terms is £360 million lower than pre-austerity levels when comparing like for like spending. With Covid, there have been additional resources flowing from Westminster, but it is not yet clear how this has improved the overall public spending picture, if at all.

It is essential that the CSR at least restores public spending in NI to the levels it was at pre-

austerity and provides the resources needed for the reforms needed for workers in health, social care, education and the community and voluntary sector.

Whilst there has been some limited engagement with trade unions in advance of this budget, a priority for the 2021 budget process will be ensuring that such engagement commences at a much earlier basis and that the budget is compiled in a way that genuinely promotes equality of opportunity and rights.

No Going Back to Normal: In September, UNISON launched the No Going Back to Normal campaign. The campaign recognises that during Covid-19, thousands of key workers across NI and GB have died looking after us. In the public services, nurses, care workers, cleaners and more made the ultimate sacrifice to help others. This was all the more heart-breaking because for years before Covid-19, these public service workers have been undervalued, underpaid and mainly invisible.



The clapping might have stopped but the support shouldn't. Join us in the fight to rebuild public services and support the people who provide them at unison.org.uk/nobacktonormal

UNISON
the public service union

Years of neglect made the effect of the pandemic so much worse. One example of that neglect was the PPE shortage that emerged when the pandemic hit. Another is the fragmented nature of care services for the elderly and vulnerable – where staff frequently experience low pay, insecure employment and impossible workloads to manage.

In our NHS a shortage of nurses and other key staff means there are fewer people to look after patients. This is the result of more than 10 years of spending cuts and austerity. The damage to all the vital services that make our communities strong and resilient, including schools and our community voluntary sector, is plain to see. Despite all this, key workers in our public services pulled through for all of us.

As government attempts to return to normal, it's crucial for all of us that the same mistakes aren't made again and we don't return to undervaluing our public services and the people who provide them. This autumn, politicians in Westminster and Stormont will be making important decisions about the future funding of our public services.

Early signs suggest the UK government wants to pitch the public sector against private sector and will ignore long term structural problems that got us to where we are now. We are calling for measures now to do the following:

No going back to normal

- Rebuild**: Rebuild all our public services, by securing long term investment and making money available to employ and train the number of staff that are needed to ensure our services are there when you need them.
- Pay**: Give public sector workers a decent pay rise because the pandemic has shown how important they are. This would also help the lowest paid out of in-work poverty.
- Create**: Create fairer and safer workplaces with proper risk assessments. Everyone should be treated with dignity and respect. Disabled workers and other vulnerable groups need to have the right to work from home whilst the risk of Covid-19 persists.
- Build**: Build a fairer and greener post Covid-19 society, in which the inequalities that have become so evident during the crisis are addressed as a matter of urgency. Over the course of the next 12 months, our campaigning activities will intensify to ensure there is no going back to normal where our public services and the people who provide them are undervalued.

No Going Back – a New Deal Towards a Safe and Secure Future for all: In May, ICTU issued detailed proposals aimed at achieving a gradual and phased economic recovery, alongside a parallel phasing out of economic supports. Radical economic interventions that may have seemed unthinkable in the past have been made to mitigate against the shock of Covid-19, but a ‘cliff-edge’ removal of supports could have significant adverse effects.

Congress is clear that there can be ‘no going back’ to the economic and social conditions that existed in NI pre Covid-19. Congress have issued detailed proposals on the measures required in terms of health, social care, social protection, education, housing, poverty, the rights of workers and taxation and public spending that should be taken to ensure a new deal for our society as we emerge from Covid-19.

UNISON is playing a key role within Congress in supporting this campaign, including co-ordinating campaign activities via the Equality Coalition which we co-convene alongside CAJ.

Corporation tax: The DUP-Tory deal to secure support for Theresa May’s Government stated that one of the first tasks for a new NI Executive would be to work towards the devolution of corporation tax rates.

This suggested that the devolution of corporation tax would remain a threat to public sector when a new Executive is formed. However, the New Decade New Approach document makes no reference to corporation tax at all, nor did the Executive budget that followed.

We will continue to oppose attempts to strip our public services of resources in this way. The introduction of a lowered corporation tax will come at a cost of a reduction of resources for public services, most recently estimated by the Department of Finance as £250 million per year.

■ Public Procurement Policy, Privatisation and PFI

Across the island of Ireland both Governments spend £billions every year buying goods and services and building public infrastructure. If Governments were to attach the right conditions to the contracts it would create an economic upturn, decent jobs, help tackle discrimination and disadvantage, regenerate our communities most in need, and strengthen our society.

The Department of Finance estimates that £3 billion is spent on NI public procurement in a typical year. Given the extent of the disruption Covid-19 has caused across public services, it is unclear whether this has been a typical year. However, we remain concerned that the privatisation agenda is moving ahead, as seen in parts of the draft Programme for Government, and despite commitments from some of the key NI parties.

We have opposed attempts to outsource or privatise services on foot of the pandemic and will continue to do so. We continue to pursue the agenda endorsed by Regional Council.

Our campaign for significant changes to homecare procurement processes is intensifying and we are working with the new Health Minister to press for the creation of a new Bargaining Forum between unions, employers and commissioners of services to ensure that private or community and voluntary sector providers pay as a minimum the real Living Wage and provide adequate terms and conditions for workers, including union recognition.

We want to see zero-hours contracts prohibited, the ending of 15-minute visits and no more short changing of service users.

Due to our advocacy, the 'Power to People' report published in December 2017 recognised that workers in the sector are 'exploited', underpaid and undervalued. Whilst not addressing all issues of concern, a clear recommendation has been made that workers must be paid at least the Living Wage.

We continue to seek best practice in the operation of public procurement with the following placed at the centre of this process:

- ethical procurement, and the promotion of equality and human rights;
- application of the CPD / ECNI guidance on equality and sustainability in public procurement; and
- the recommendations of the NI Human Rights Commission on human rights and procurement.

We continue to press for change while EU laws are still in place as we have no doubt that post-Brexit, the UK Government will seek to liberalise and privatise.



■ Employment and trade union law

As part of the 'New Decade, New Approach' agreement, political parties agreed to bring forward a new Programme for Government to include measures to protect workers' rights by April 2020. Specifically, the parties agreed that the Executive should commit to becoming a Living Wage employer, move to ban zero hours contracts and that powers to set minimum wage levels should be made a devolved matter.

The new Programme for Government has been significantly delayed as a result of the response to Covid-19. We have made it clear to both the First Minister and Deputy First Minister that we expect direct input on all aspects of a new Programme for Government on an ongoing basis, particularly in the delivery of these commitments.

We are very concerned that the new Internal Market Bill will impede the development of progressive measures on workers' rights, as highlighted above. Through ICTU we are seeking to co-ordinate a joint Trade Union response to a Private Members' Bill on trade union freedoms, with a particular focus on

seeking a statutory right to collective bargaining. This involves working with all parties to secure support.

ICTU has now produced a guidance for MLAs setting out the trade union position on future workers and trade union rights.

■ The environment and the green economy

Regional Committee continues to encourage all of our activists to explore green initiatives with their employers and is calling on all branches to adopt the actions in the UNISON Go Green at Work campaign.

The Scottish Government has led the way in banning fracking. UNISON is committed to securing the same result in NI. Regional Council has strongly supported our branches in Fermanagh, Antrim and Belfast by highlighting our opposition to fracking and drilling in debate at Council meetings over the past 2 years. Fermanagh Council has suspended its draft local development consultation, with immediate effect, after it emerged a section intended to strongly

oppose local fracking had been changed without councillors' knowledge or consent. Now that devolved Government has returned, we will be renewing our campaigning on these issues. We are pleased to report that our allies in the Stop the Drill Campaign have secured a victory against drilling exploration in Woodburn Forest after 6 years of intensive campaigning.



Low pay, poverty and targeting social need

■ Challenging poverty and welfare reform

The Covid-19 pandemic has only served to highlight the extent to which poverty negatively affects our members, the public and our communities. Those areas that are most deprived have been worst affected by the pandemic.

We are concerned that as increasing redundancies begin to bite and Government supports taper off, what was already a serious and persistent problem in our society will only grow worse.



Anti-Poverty Strategy: That is why, with the restoration of devolved Government, we have renewed our calls for the development of an anti-poverty strategy as a key action required in response to Covid-19. The New Decade New Approach agreement recommitments the Executive to the introduction of an anti-poverty strategy as part of a new Programme for Government, further to the legal obligation that has been on the Executive to develop such a strategy based on objective need. Previously the Executive had failed to comply with the Judicial Review decision requiring it to develop an anti-poverty strategy based on objective need.

We have met the new Communities Minister (who has responsibility to lead the development of an anti-poverty strategy) on several occasions and will continue to press the case for delivery of the strategy without further delay.

This strategy should be based on the principles agreed by Anti-Poverty Network, Child Poverty Alliance and CAJ at the conference hosted by UNISON in April 2016. In recent days the Minister has established an expert advisory panel and a number of working groups to take the issue forward.

The panel will make recommendations on the key themes and priorities that the strategy should address and will report to the Minister by 31 December 2020. A Strategy Co-design Group has also been established and will include a NIAPN representative. It is anticipated that the Strategy will be published by December 2021.

Poverty and economic inequality in NI continue to dominate and are directly related to the failure of our Government to address it. It is a core issue for UNISON with our members, their families and communities becoming more impoverished as a result of damaging decisions by both the UK and NI Governments and irresponsible decisions by many employers. It also comes as no surprise that the most disadvantaged communities have been hardest hit by the pandemic.

Low pay, poverty and welfare cuts: Individuals on the lowest incomes are most dependent on state welfare support, leaving them more vulnerable to poverty over time as the full extent of welfare cuts begin to bite.

The most recent research from the Department of Communities shows that:

- absolute poverty levels rose between 2017/18 and 2018/19;
- less than 60% of individuals in NI had an income below the UK median income of £514 per week. The NI median income is £478 per week. Average household incomes, after housing costs, decreased by 3%;
- income inequality (the gap between the highest income and lowest income households) is widening;
- Poverty rates are rising. 20% of individuals in NI live in relative poverty after housing costs, with 18% living in absolute poverty;
- the proportion of children estimated to be living in both relative (24%) and absolute poverty (21%) has risen;

- the majority of those in relative poverty belong to working families. In total, 201,000 working-age adults were in relative poverty before housing costs were factored in, with 65% in working families and 35% in families where no one was in work.

All of this is based on data from 2 years ago. It is clear that when the analysis is conducted of this year, and the years to come, the effects of Covid-19 will have served to exacerbate already unacceptable levels of poverty even further. This is a real challenge for our branches as they increase the number of welfare advice clinics.

“Cliff edge” – ending of welfare mitigations in 2020: UNISON NI is involved in the work of the Cliff Edge NI Coalition of civil society organisations which was campaigning for both the extension of welfare mitigations after they were due to expire in March 2020. This would have significantly increased poverty for both adults and children in NI.



The ‘New Decade, New Approach’ agreement contained commitments to both review and extend welfare mitigations beyond March 2020. Due to Covid-19, the legislation needed to do so has not been passed, but mitigation payments continue to be made under special powers contained in the Budget Act until the end of the September. The Communities Minister has announced that she will bring forward legislation to extend the mitigations further.

Alongside the Cliff Edge Coalition and Equality Coalition, we continue to engage with the Communities Minister to ensure that welfare mitigations are changed to reflect the impact of delays in receiving universal credit and the effect of the two-child cap, that we have repeatedly opposed.

We wish to avoid further ‘cliff edges’ and want to see mitigations extended indefinitely. The Minister has committed to a review of the mitigations package.

To effectively tackle poverty, it is essential that Government puts poverty reduction at the core of their economic and social policies and ensures that any anti-poverty strategies are underpinned by an equality and human rights-based approach. Poverty in NI will never be effectively tackled in an environment of continued cuts to welfare benefits and short-term mitigation measures.

Low pay: We have reported in Section 2 on our main bargaining interventions on low pay and poverty. Our policy interventions are being taken in co-ordination with our allies in the Equality Coalition and the NIAPN.

Given the vulnerability of the lowest paid to poverty, we continue to campaign for a real Living Wage based on the recommendations of the Living Wage Foundation, to be the minimum standard of pay for all workers. We have called for the introduction of the real Living Wage across all of the public sector and that it should be a condition of all procurement exercises between public bodies and the private, community and voluntary and social enterprise sectors.



Alongside ICTU we are pushing for the full implementation of the commitment made in the ‘New Decade, New Approach’ agreement that the Executive will be a living wage employer.

As outlined above, we successfully secured a recommendation to this effect within the ‘Power to People’ report on the reform of adult social care.

All campaigning on these issues will continue to be informed by our bargaining activities in combating low pay and economic inequality.

Childcare: UNISON, alongside ICTU, our allies in the women’s movement, NGOs and a number of community and voluntary organisations, have come together to form the Childcare for All campaign. This is in response to the spiralling costs of childcare, which denies parents, particularly women and the lowest paid, the opportunity to stay in work, education or training. There is still no dedicated Childcare Strategy for NI. In October 2018, the UK Government ended the Childcare Vouchers scheme for all new applicants.



The campaign is calling for universal, child centred childcare that meets the needs of children, families and childcare workers. UNISON has signed the Childcare for All charter calling for a childcare system that is affordable, accessible, offers high quality provision and recognises the value of childcare through decent pay, terms and conditions for workers.

As part of the ‘New Decade, New Approach’ agreement, the new Executive is to publish a Childcare Strategy and identify resources to deliver early education and care initiatives for families with children aged 3-4. We were concerned that this commitment seemed limited to only providing childcare for 3-4 year olds, and the publication of a Childcare Strategy has not occurred.

During Covid-19, the impact of the loss of childcare as providers were closed was hugely felt by our members, who either had to balance working from home with caring for their children, or arrange emergency childcare so that they could continue to work.

The initial Executive recovery plan after the first phase of the pandemic did not reference childcare, and there was widespread frustration at the slow speed with which funding earmarked to support the sector was released.

We are working to protect our members working in childcare settings who now face either reduced hours or possible redundancies as the sector tries to recover from the economic shock of the lockdown.

A key priority over the last several months has been ensuring that as childcare facilities reopened after the pandemic, they did so in a way that was safe for our members and the children they care for. We are pursuing a new

strategy to seek greater recognition of UNISON from employers across the childcare sector.

We will continue to work with our allies to advance the original Childcare for All campaign objectives in the coming year, but with the additional focus of ensuring that the vital role of the childcare workforce is recognised and protected.

NI Anti-Poverty Network: Thomas Mahaffy, Head of Organising, remains on the Board of the NI Anti-Poverty Network. As reported earlier in this section, Board members Goretta Horgan and Teresa Agnew are respectively on the new expert advisory panel and strategy co-design group established to progress the new anti-poverty strategy for NI.

■ Community & voluntary sector

Our campaign of opposition against cuts to the Supporting People Programme continues. This programme provides vulnerable people with support to live independently in the community, including through the provision of specialist housing or hostels. It supports nearly 20,000 people every year and benefits a wide range of groups including the homeless; persons with disabilities; persons with mental health issues or a learning disability; older people; women at risk of domestic violence; young people at risk; and people with addiction issues.

UNISON members in the sector work hard to provide these vital services, but are doing so under increasing pressure and are suffering pay cuts or pay freezes and an erosion of their terms and conditions because of a lack of funding. Funding is not rising to match demand and the increasing cost of providing services. These cuts have taken place despite evidence showing that every £1 spent on the programme saves the public £1.90 elsewhere.

With return of the Executive, we have met with the new Communities Minister (who has lead responsibility for the Supporting People programme) and through our interventions have avoided the introduction of a

standardised regional payment rate for the programme.

The introduction of this rate would not have addressed the deficit in funding which has been allowed to grow, and had the potential to lead to a 'race to the bottom' as providers attempt to reduce their labour costs and the amount of support provided to service-users. We are pressing for full engagement with the NI Housing Executive on the development of alternative funding options for the programme, in line with our campaign objectives.

We are now supporting the branch in developing a new campaign plan, highlighting the incredible work that our members in the sector have done in responding to Covid-19. Our focus will be on securing greater funding and better pay and conditions for the workforce.



UNISON policy campaigns - health and social services

Response to Covid-19: In responding to one of the gravest public health emergencies the world has ever known, we have been guided by the overriding objective of keeping both the public safe and our members safe to care for them.



We have sought to engage constructively with the Minister, Department of Health, regional health bodies and all Trusts in order to find solutions on the major issues, whilst also robustly and publicly challenging them over the speed and intensity of their response.

As outlined above, a key priority has been ensuring that all Government Departments, not just Health, recognise that they have a role to play in building the new model of public health that will finally address the shocking levels of health inequality that have affected our communities for too long.

PPE: From a very early stage UNISON publicly expressed our concerns at the situation with regards to the provision and guidance on the use of PPE across both acute settings, community settings and within the private sector.

Engagement with trade unions on these issues by the Department of Health and the other responsible health bodies has not always been consistent and our views have not always been acted upon.

During the period of the pandemic our concerns have included:

- The supply and availability of adequate PPE for our membership working in both acute settings and in the community;
- Ensuring that PPE is available for non-clinical workers where necessary, including cleaners, porters and administrative staff;
- Linked to the relatively low levels of community testing in the early stage of the pandemic, that guidance on the use of PPE for workers in the community limited its use to known or suspected cases of Covid-19;
- Our opposition to guidance being adopted for NI on shortages and the reuse of PPE which could compromise the health and safety of our members, a situation which we continue to monitor closely;
- The relatively high rates of failure in terms of PPE fit testing for particular kinds of masks, which disproportionately affects a predominantly female workforce.

Now we are in the next phase of the pandemic it is vital that lessons are learnt around the provision of PPE and the development of guidance on its use.



We are demanding assurances that sufficient stocks of PPE are in place. In assessing the levels of PPE required, an approach which assesses demand on the basis of a sustained surge of Covid-19, rather than on average use should be used.

Given the difficulties experienced within the first surge by private sector providers in sourcing PPE (particularly care homes and

domiciliary care providers), assurances should be offered here of ongoing support in supplying PPE from Trusts and BSO. Any future procurement contracts must require assurances that the provider can provide.

Testing: From the early stages of this pandemic we have been concerned by the approach that has been taken to testing, both in terms of the speed with which testing capacity has grown and the scope of testing for both the public and health and social care workers. Due to our interventions, testing was intensified across the nursing home sector to the extent that a programme was introduced to test all residents and staff across all nursing homes, regardless of whether that home is experiencing an outbreak of Covid-19 or not.

Whilst we have assurances that this programme of testing will be ongoing, we are continuing to challenge on the speed and regularity of testing, particularly as it falls under the 'Pillar 2' UK wide testing regime which has already experienced frequent problems even before we entered the second wave.



Covid-19 in care homes and community settings: UNISON, alongside Amnesty International UK and CAJ have publicly called for a full independent public inquiry into the handling of Covid-19 within care homes in NI, with particular reference to very high number of deaths of care home residents that has occurred during the course of the pandemic.

NISRA has reported that by the week ending 28th August 2020, 432 care home residents had died involving Covid-19. This included both care home residents who had died either within the care home itself, or in hospital. The deaths of care home residents

account for 49.5% of all Covid-19 related deaths. Given the very high number of deaths that have occurred of care home residents, it is UNISON's position that an independent, effective and prompt investigation in conformity with Article 2 of the European Convention of Human Rights is required.

A full public inquiry that satisfies the requirements of Article 2 of the European Convention of Human Rights can ensure that there is full transparency and accountability in relation to the decisions that have been taken up to this point. It is also the best way to ensure that the proper learning is taken from this pandemic and acted upon.

In response to the Rapid Learning Initiative on Covid-19 and Care Homes established by the Department of Health in June, UNISON made a detailed submission based on the experiences of our members working across care homes during the first wave of the pandemic. We have further responded to the HSCB/PHA on its proposed Care Home Action Plan Phase 2.

On the issue of sick pay for workers within care homes from March until June, we frequently highlighted instances where our members had to take extended periods of sick leave as a result of contracting Covid-19 or having to self-isolate with Covid-19 symptoms. During this period, they suffered significant financial hardship as a result of most employers only providing the bare minimum of statutory sick pay.

Due to our campaigning, the Department moved to fund the extension of sick pay to cover 80% of staff's average salary from 1st June. This followed from our successful interventions earlier in the spring where we secured support for homecare workers to receive 80% of their salary where there was a downturn in their normal hours as people were reluctant to allow others into their own homes.

However, this sick pay scheme was not backdated and expired at the end of August. We are calling for its reintroduction following

announcements by the Westminster Government that it was moving to fund full sick pay for workers in social care over the winter.

Extending sick pay support is of vital importance in preventing any future spread of Covid-19 within care homes, as it will significantly contribute to ensuring that staff do not attend work where they should not do so. Without this protection of their incomes, staff will be placed in extremely difficult positions which could compromise their own health and the health of residents.

We continue to demand that PPE is not only supplied to care homes in a consistent manner, but that there is strong oversight by Trusts and the RQIA in ensuring that staff have access to adequate PPE where it is required.

Alongside the RCN, we did not support the 'Safe at Home' pilot initiative which would have seen staff live in care homes with residents. We raised numerous issues with the Department during the development of this proposal including:

- how the mental and physical well-being of staff would be assured;
- the nature and type of accommodation that would be made available to them;
- how those care homes taking part would be selected;
- what staff would be asked to take part and how redeployment for those choosing not to take part would be undertaken; and
- what rates of pay and terms and conditions for staff 'locked-in' under this arrangement would be.

As our collective concerns were not sufficiently addressed, neither UNISON nor the RCN were able to support the pilot initiative. Despite our objections, the Department of Health proceeded to seek the implement of the pilot but, as we understand it, have had no applications to take part as of yet from providers.

We remain concerned that outside of care homes, learning from the impact of the first surge on other areas of social care is not being taken on board as we enter a second surge.

Within the first surge, issues arose within domiciliary care on both provision of adequate PPE, and clear advice and guidance on when PPE would be required. In general terms, it was understood that PPE was only for use for domiciliary care workers in relation to confirmed or possible cases of Covid-19.



Given the relatively low levels of testing, particularly in the community, for Covid-19 that existed during the first wave of the pandemic, workers were deeply concerned about providing intimate care for multiple people (many of whom will be particularly vulnerable if infected with Covid-19 due to their age or underlying health conditions) with no way of knowing whether they could be transmitting the disease or could be becoming infected themselves.

We continue to press for much more stringent guidance on the consistent use of PPE in community settings going forwards and on the introduction of a better testing regime for staff.

In addition, day centre provision for adults with learning disabilities and older people was significantly impacted in the first phase of the pandemic. Staff were often redeployed from these settings into other roles in response to Covid-19.

A lack of day centre provision has significant consequences for families and carers. As day centres have been re-opening on a phased basis during the summer months, UNISON have been raising issues with regards to PPE, testing for service-users and staff alike, ensuring consistency of staffing and limiting the use of agency staffing, and achieving social distancing. A particular issue has been returning staff redeployed into primary care during phase 1. Given the stated intention to increase services over the coming months, it is important that these issues are resolved by Trusts in conjunction with trade unions.

Restarting HSC Services: In anticipation of a surge of Covid-19 cases in the spring, numerous services were stood down across HSC Trusts, with the Belfast City Hospital being designated as NI's Nightingale Covid Hospital. It is clear that the standing down of HSC services will have a significant negative effect on already unacceptably long waiting lists, as acknowledged by the Health Minister.

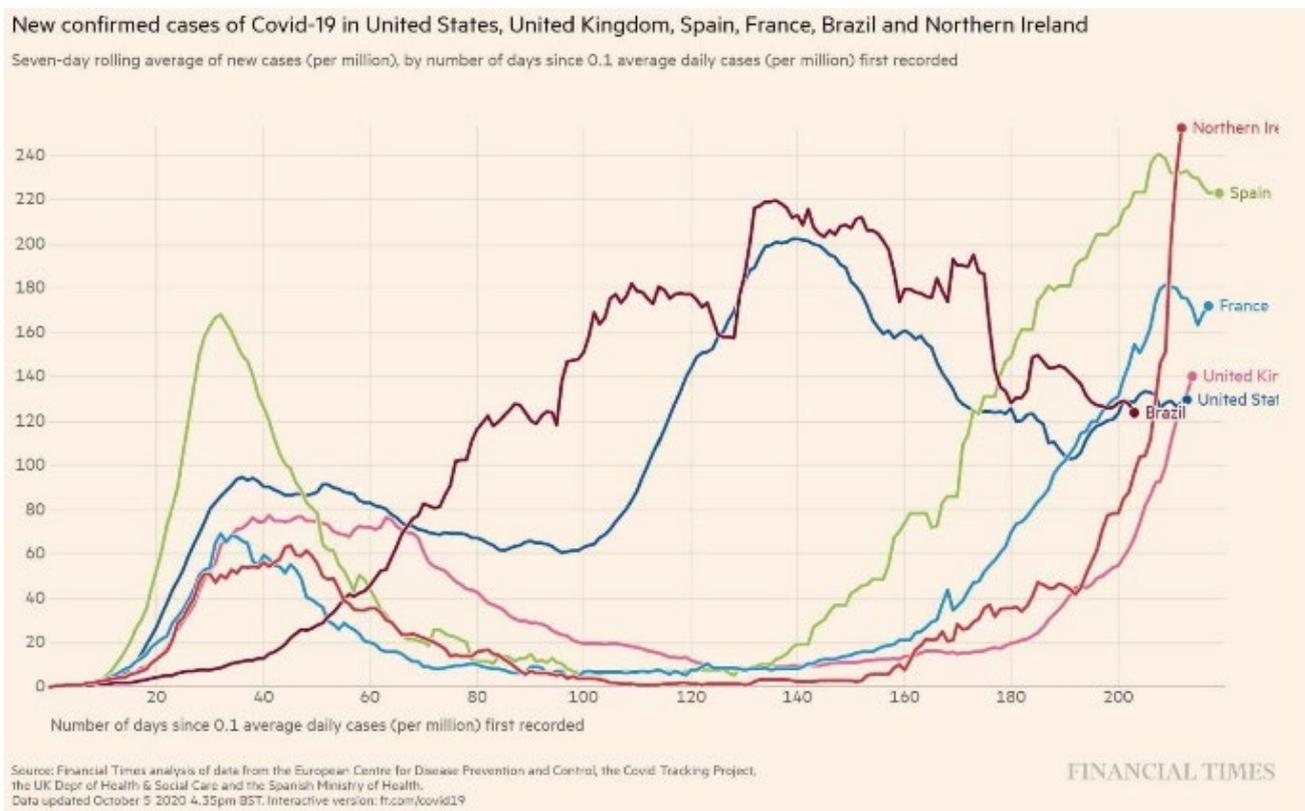
It should also be recognised that standing down of services may well have come at a great cost for many people, when the number of excess deaths that occurred

during the first phase of the pandemic are considered.

NISRA reports that there were 885 excess deaths from 1st March to 30th June 2020, 17.4% above average deaths for the same period over the last five years. In the same period, there were 837 Covid-19 related deaths. Excess deaths were highest in the most deprived areas, with just over a 20% increase in deaths compared to expected levels. The vast majority of excess deaths occurred amongst those aged over 75, with the majority occurring at home.

Whilst all these deaths cannot necessarily be attributed to the standing down of services, it seems clear that this did have a major impact.

Whilst we absolutely recognised the importance of ensuring that critical care capacity was protected, we were also concerned by the potential for such changes to become permanent reconfigurations in the absence of full consultation with trade unions and the public. Whilst we have received assurances that this will not occur, we continue to challenge to ensure that this commitment is maintained.



HSC Trusts were asked to submit plans to the Department for restarting services, initially for June only, with 3 month plans then to be submitted in July. New plans were due to be submitted in October, but the Minister has delayed these due to the growing number of Covid-19 infections. We inputted into the development of Departmental guidance on the restarting of services.

Our key demands included that:

- co-production and co-design approaches be used by Trusts when restarting services, with trade unions involved from the earliest possible stage;
- thorough and ongoing health and safety assessments are conducted including consideration of issues such as social distancing, PPE, the use of screens, appointment scheduling and patient flow must all be considered; and
- that clear protocols for staff returning to workplaces and/or being redeployed should be developed and agreed with trade unions.

However, as this process has continued, we have been concerned by the lack of genuine and timely engagement, co-production and co-design with trade unions on both the re-opening of services and the wider transformation process. We continue to challenge on the failure to engage in proper consultation and assessment of policies for their impact on the promotion of equality of opportunity under section 75 of the NI Act 1998.



HSC Management Board – threatening democratic accountability: In June, the Minister published a Strategic Framework for Rebuilding HSC services, which included the creation of a new HSC Management Board.

There was no meaningful engagement with trade unions prior to the creation of this Board, nor is their workforce representation on it. This situation is unacceptable and fails to recognise that the workforce is both at the frontline in dealing with Covid-19 and is taking the lead in rebuilding services.

Prior to Covid-19 the HSC workforce was already significantly overstretched due to the thousands of vacancies that existed across NI, issues which led to the industrial action undertaken by our members at the end of 2019. A commitment to deal with those issues by the Department was at the heart of the resolution of that industrial dispute. Given the undoubted major impact that Covid-19 will have had on the workforce, their views must be central within any plans to rebuild services.

In addition, we have highlighted our concerns at the lack of independent expertise within this new structure and the potential that it will simply become a new bureaucracy in a health service already overburdened on this front. We have sought full openness and transparency around the decisions of this Board, which we fear will remove democratic accountability from the decision-making processes around the health service.

Delivering Together: The 10-year strategy 'Delivering Together' was launched 4 years ago. We gave a cautious welcome to the strategy which was also accompanied by commitments on increased staffing, the Living Wage, and an emphasis on in-house delivery of homecare services. It was the first time a Health Minister acknowledged that NHS staff and unions would play a key role in the co-design of new services and that additional funding would be required for implementation.

This, coupled with the restoration of the Health Service Partnership Forum, created some optimism that we were finally going to deliver health service reform and reorganisation in a manner which genuinely involved and served the public and the workforce alike.

With the Executive restored, we moved to engage urgently with the new Minister so that decisions are taken which improve our health service, the outcomes experienced by the public and our members' working lives. We made clear to the Minister that he needed to ensure that NHS staff and unions play a key role in the co-design of new services as set out in the 'Delivering Together' strategy. We highlighted that securing the funding needed to both run existing services and implement genuine transformation, not more cuts, remains a priority.



Since this initial intervention with the new Minister, the focus of the system turned to the emergency response to Covid. However, with the creation of the new HSC Management Board we have grown very concerned that major decisions to significantly change the health service will be made behind closed doors and without sufficient scrutiny or accountability, under the cloak of the emergency response.

We have made it very clear to the Minister that this will be unacceptable and that we must be involved in real partnership working to rebuild our health service. We continue to press for full engagement with UNISON and the wider Partnership Forum.

Reform of elective care: In July, the Minister announced that Lagan Valley Hospital would become a new regional 'hub' site for elective surgery in NI. Whilst pilots had been ongoing previously into elective care hubs, the decision to announce Lagan Valley as a single 'hub' site had not been preceded by any public consultation or detailed engagement with trade unions on staffing implications. We swiftly moved to challenge the Minister

and officials on the lack of proper workforce engagement and on the reasons for the selection of Lagan Valley. UNISON is now represented on the Regional Day Procedure Centre Network Board, which has been established to take forward the reform of elective care based on the Minister's announcement. However, we have made it very clear that our involvement is on the basis that we will defend the interests of our members, their families and communities.

We continue to work with our local representatives in the South Eastern Trust on the reform of elective care, and ensuring that this process is undertaken in a way that both protects the workforce and improves outcomes for all patients will be a priority over the next 12 months.

'No more silos' - Reform of primary care and unscheduled care: Over the last several months we have intensified engagement with Departmental officials on their plans to both reform primary care services and unscheduled care, including accident and emergency care. The Department is seeking to integrate primary and secondary care, following the broad approach taken during the first wave of the pandemic where primary care centres were re-purposed as Covid centres in an effort to triage patients.

We have questioned the feasibility of extending this approach, given the wide variety of both physical and mental health problems that the public presents in A&E with. We have clearly stated that we will not accept any attempt to outsource or transfer staff from the public sector to private sector GP federations, and we have demanded that the Department facilitate direct engagement between trade unions and the federations. We have directed the Department to the work of the 'Deep End' models of primary care for areas of deprivation presented at the Jonathan Swallow conference in 2018.

We are awaiting a full public consultation that has been promised on the future regional plan for unscheduled care. However, we have made clear to the review team that

the Safe Staffing agenda must be at the heart of any plans to improve unscheduled care.

The review team has offered some assurances that they intend to recommend more resources for unscheduled care, including for community-based care, rather than seeking to close emergency departments. However, we will monitor this closely in the coming months as the consultation emerges.

Challenging threats to stroke and breast assessment services: Last year we reported on proposals to ‘reform’ essential stroke and breast assessment services that in our view would have serious detrimental effects on the health of the public. Backed by Regional Council, Regional Committee and the service groups we have robustly challenged the evidence base for these proposals, which would significantly disadvantage those living in the most remote, rural areas and which could exacerbate health inequalities.

When Minister Swann was appointed in January, our opposition to these plans was a priority item on the agenda. We understand that he is now reluctant to take forward any major reform given the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, building on our public campaigning in opposing these closures in conjunction with our branches will remain a priority for Regional Committee. We congratulate all our branches who have been working closely with local community-based campaigns opposing these closures.

Review of adult social care: We have previously reported on the publication of the ‘Power to People – Proposals to reboot adult care and support in NI’. Due to our advocacy, the ‘Power to People’ report has recognised that workers in the sector are ‘exploited’ and are underpaid and undervalued. Whilst not addressing all issues of concern, a clear recommendation has been made that workers must be paid at least the Living Wage. With a new Minister in place, we are seeking implementation of this recommendation as a priority.

Whilst UNISON is represented on the Project Team and Board established by the Department of Health to prepare proposals to implement the ‘Power to People’ report, these bodies were temporarily stood down as part of the emergency response to Covid.

However, in May we noted the public recognition by the Minister of the low pay and poor terms and conditions experienced by workers across the sector. The Minister made a public commitment to improve pay and terms and conditions. We have been engaging with the Minister and Department to call for the establishment of a Bargaining Forum, where the Department, unions and employers could resolve these longstanding issues. We will continue to press for this approach over the coming months.

Safeguarding vulnerable adults & protecting workers: At the 2018 Regional Council, the Regional Committee’s report and motion on Dunmurry Manor was unanimously adopted. Prior to the publication of the COPNI report on Dunmurry Manor in 2018, we had agreed in principle with the then Chief Executive of RQIA to establish a protocol for the exchange of information in relation to social care to ensure that as the regulator it responds to our members’ concerns and takes appropriate actions to improve the quality of care.



We prepared a draft Protocol and sought that RQIA agree to this. However, RQIA subsequently refused to do so, on the basis that it instead wished to reach an agreement with all trade unions. It subsequently never initiated a process to reach such an agreement. In our view, the actions of RQIA are unacceptable and form a completely inadequate response to the findings of the COPNI report.

At an early stage in the pandemic, the Department decided to scale back the RQIA inspection and regulation functions and directed them to provide support to residential and nursing home providers. Given the experiences of our members during the 1st wave of the pandemic, we have called for this decision to be revisited.

A unique situation developed in June 2020 when it was revealed that the entire board of

the RQIA had resigned. No explanation has been given and we believe this is material to any public enquiry into the handling of the pandemic in our care homes.

We have also once again sought that the RQIA agree an information-sharing protocol, having been encouraged by Minister Swann to do so. We will not accept the RQIA refusing to implement such a protocol at a time when it is clearly needed.

UNISON policy campaigns - education

Response to Covid-19: Our key bargaining interventions in supporting our members in education in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic are set out in Section 2.

As schools began to return in August after the lockdown and summer break, our key focus was ensuring that the return to school was done in a way that protected pupils and workers from harm. At times this has required us to publicly challenge the EA and Department of Education on inadequate guidance, poor consultation, and a failure to put in place measures to protect health and safety with the necessary speed.

The New School Day Guidance published by the Department of Education in August (following the decision to reopen schools full-time, rather than part-time) raised more questions than answers for our members in catering, cleaning, transport and for classroom assistants. The Department gave trade unions less than 24 hours to respond to this draft guidance before its publication, showing complete disregard for their legal duties to consult.

We have reminded them constantly that our members have a legal right not to work in an environment which endangers their health and safety, a right our members have been forced to rely upon as schools have returned. Alongside the Equality Coalition we continue to work to see policies put in place to ensure that already disadvantaged children do not fall further behind as a result of the pandemic.



With a reformed Executive and new Minister in place, we continue to press for decisions on the future of education to be taken within an equality and rights framework. UNISON demands include an education system:

- that delivers to disadvantaged areas, is non-selective, and promotes equality;
- that challenges disadvantage and supports improvement by taking forward a new approach to the funding formula that not only restores recent cuts, but targets objective need and inequality;
- that provides free and nutritional meals for all pupils;
- that protects and strengthens the work of classroom, nursery and special needs staff;
- that protects cleaning, catering and schools-based staff against the threat of privatisation;
- that ensures that all staff in schools are employed on fair contracts;
- that stops plans to curtail Special Educational Needs services for pre-school children;
- that ensures that future area planning processes consider workforce issues and maintain job levels.

Budget cuts: We have reported for several years on the sustained funding crisis facing our education services. Whilst spending on education was increased in this year's budget, it did not rise in line with the £427 million sought by the Department in February. We have previously reported on the sustained real terms reductions experienced by schools budgets and the growing number of schools in budget deficit. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has previously found that NI has faced the highest spending cuts across the UK per pupil over the last decade, with an 11% real terms cut in spending per pupil since 2009.

Common Funding Formula: We continue to press for greater transparency in the Education Funding Formula. The funding of education is complex as are the governance arrangements. For this reason, we summarise the funding system in our annual report for the benefit of branches and members.

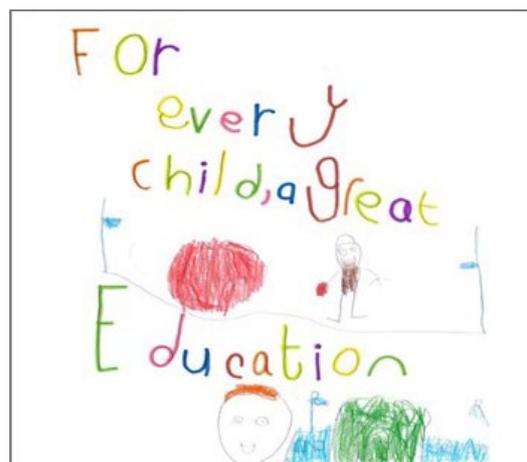
A guide to education funding in NI

The Common Funding Scheme for the local management of schools is the means by which the education budget is distributed. The total amount to be spent on schools is called the General Schools Budget (excluding special schools). It is made up of three specific categories of spending:

- The Aggregated Schools Budget is the total amount delegated to individual schools under the LMS common formula;
- Resources Held at Centre are amounts allocated to school budgets other than by means of the common formula (for example, for the payment of substitute teachers in certain circumstances);
- Centrally Held Resources Attributable to Schools are amounts held by ELBs for services provided to schools in their area - for example home to school transport and school meals.

The percentage of the education budget allocated to the aggregated schools budget is just over 60%. An additional 12% of the overall budget is allocated to schools from centre budgets held by the Education Authority. 13% is allocated for attributable services such as school meals.

UNISON made detailed recommendations to the last review of the common funding formula, some of which were taken on board by the previous Education Minister.



As previously reported, the initial Assembly debate on the new formula was the subject of attempts by certain politicians to sectarianise the agenda and we vigorously challenged these moves to attack objective need.

As part of the 'New Decade, New Approach' agreement a panel has been appointed to examine the links between educational underachievement and socio-economic background. UNISON will be making a full submission to the review panel, seeking to ensure that the funding of schools delivers for children living in poverty.

Special Educational Needs: The Education Authority continues to pursue a strategic direction for the provision of services for children with special educational needs that is more focussed on managing austerity than promoting the best interests of the child.

The Department of Education has recently launched a new consultation on a revised SEN framework, new SEN regulations and a revised Code of Practice. In responding to this consultation, we will be seeking to protect and develop existing SEN provision. SEN provision must be supported by levels of funding that are responsive to growing demand and which result in the needs of all children being properly met, rather than diverting children into mainstream schools inappropriately.

We are firmly resisting any attempts to casualise the workforce. It is vital that the voices of the children affected and their parents are heard and acted upon.

Area Planning: We continue to monitor the Area Planning process. We are clear that where UNISON has substantial membership in a school that is threatened with closure, and there is demonstrable local community support for the school to remain open, UNISON will give full support to anti-closure campaigns.

In campaigning for more resources for education services, we are mindful that a key consideration in area planning is a school's financial position. Our position is that schools should not be judged as unsustainable and face closure or merger in future because they have been the victims of austerity.

UNISON will continue to monitor all development proposals put forward which affect our members and will ensure their interests are safeguarded within the area planning process.

Free School Meals 4 All: Following on from the resolution passed at 2018 Council and with devolution restored, we have established a Working Group comprised of reps from across health and education to take forward the development of a new campaign calling for universal free school meal provision for all children and young people.

The Regional Committee campaign has three broad complementary objectives that it will seek to achieve in support of actions being led within our bargaining structures – primarily in education, but also in health, taking into account the key public health implications of Free School Meals.

The campaign's objectives are:

- Seeking universal nutritious free school meals for all pupils to both reduce poverty and improve public health;
- To safeguard and promote the vital work of our members within schools catering. School meals services should be publicly provided;
- As a response to Covid-19 to build support for the implementation of a public health model across Government that is aimed at dealing with health and educational inequalities that have been exacerbated during the pandemic.

In order to achieve these regional objectives, we have launched a co-ordinated campaign across all our branches, led by our education members and activists.

As a starting point for the campaign we have established an online platform to engage our members, listen to their experiences and concerns and use these to form the basis for our interventions with Government and our media/communications strategy. We have started a petition calling on the NI Executive to provide universal free school meals. Further actions will follow before the New Year.



Time for Change – The UNISON-led partnerships

The UNISON NI Partnership Programme is led by Thomas Mahaffy on behalf of Regional Committee and is supported by relevant branch and staff members for each project. Union / employer partnership advisor, Pamela Dooley, continues to assist this work including the delivery of a bespoke partnership training programme for managers and union activists.

Fundamentally, these UNISON-led partnerships are focused on delivering true inclusion, real equality of decision-making and increasing opportunities for frontline workers to have a direct voice in how quality care is delivered across our health and social services.



The history, principles and objectives that have underpinned them over the past 20 years can be found in the 'Time for Change' report www.unison-ni.org.uk/unison-led-partnerships.

UNISON / NI Ambulance Service health & wellbeing partnership: This partnership with the NI Ambulance Service has a specific health and wellbeing focus given the historic issues of work-related stress facing staff, and the results of the UNISON survey which confirmed low morale, dissatisfaction, and mental health problems across staff groups and areas.

Over the past 12 months significant progress has been achieved on the project despite the impact of the health strike and Covid-19 which has limited the direct face to face engagement with members and the workforce that is fundamental to the UNISON collaborative partnership model. In January and February, a schedule of meetings and UNISON training was put in place for control staff in Altnagelvin, focusing on increasing staff resilience and promoting health and wellbeing. Specific sessions included managing challenging conversations and suicide awareness.

In August and September the Partnership convened focus groups with HQ staff, operational staff, UNISON stewards and station officers to understand the personal experience of staff in relation to Covid-19 and what they

felt needed to be done in readiness for a further surge. The results of this process will be assessed and analysed by the Partnership and NIAS for further action.

A project manager for the NIAS Patient Care Service Review has been appointed and he has engaged in a series of one to one interviews with North Eastern Area Control staff to address issues such as training and CPD requirements. These were the same themes that emerged from previous focus groups organised by the Partnership

These activities have been additional to the ongoing work of the partnership in seeking to improve relationships and communications between staff groups and with management, and to prioritise management leadership and skills development as key to positive organisational change within the service. The partnership also continues to prioritise the new Peer Support debriefing programme; and the revitalised Women's Development Forum.

UNISON / Northern HSC Trust Support Services Project in Antrim Hospital: The significant progress made in this project was outlined in last year's report and evaluation was planned to begin at the end of 2019. However, this has been delayed due to Covid-19.



UNISON will be meeting with the new Trust management team in November to develop a plan to assess outcomes, identify remaining challenges, and ensure that the positive working relationships developed through the partnership process are maintained in the longer term.

Projects in development: Projects with the Belfast HSC Trust remain at the planning stage but will be progressed after Regional Council.

Equality and human rights

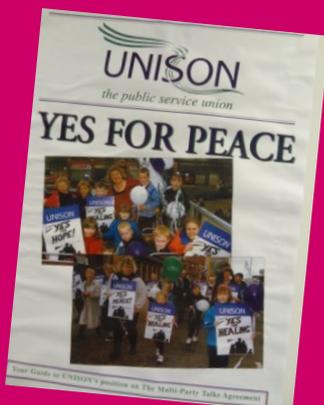
The Good Friday Agreement contained extensive commitments on equality and human rights. These permeated all 3 strands of the Agreement and the codes and operation of devolved Government. These commitments were central to UNISON support in the 1998 referendum.

The St Andrew's Agreement in 2006, while less vocal on the commitments, still retained equality as central. It also committed to a statutory anti-poverty strategy on the basis of objective need. Further Agreements such as Stormont House and Fresh Start, arising from continual political crises, have radically demoted equality and moved away from a Bill of Rights for NI thus reflecting the rollback on equality and human rights which we highlighted in previous reports.

The absence of political will to embed equality and human rights commitments as a framework for Government led to the collapse of the Executive and Assembly.

The 'New Decade, New Approach' agreement contains a range of commitments on human rights and equality strategies. Alongside our allies pressing for delivery of these commitments is a key priority of the Regional Committee.

We have reported over the years our concerns on the roll-back on equality and human rights and its direct impact on our members' jobs, rights and daily lives. Securing these commitments remains a UNISON priority.



UNISON NI's influential 'Yes for Peace' leaflet was produced in 1998 in support of the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent Referendum

The Impact of an EU exit on equality and human rights protections, including the Human Rights Act: We cannot overstate the threat to our Peace Agreement of exiting the EU, particularly without clear commitments being made and implemented on equality and human rights.

The Good Friday Agreement sought to protect human rights in NI through requiring that the UK Government incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into law, with direct access to the courts and remedies for alleged violations of rights. This was done through the Human Rights Act 1998.

The Tories have repeatedly stated a desire to repeal the Human Rights Act 1998. Its repeal would breach the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. Repeal of the Act becomes even more likely after an exit from the EU. EU member states are required to be members of the European Convention on Human Rights, a requirement that no longer applies to the UK. As outlined above, the UK is now refusing to be bound by the Convention as part of a Future Relationship agreement with the EU. The Internal Market Bill currently going through Parliament would regress the incorporation of the ECHR, contravening the Good Friday Agreement.

The Good Friday Agreement also includes a principle of equivalence between human rights protections in NI and the Republic of Ireland. This principle is now at serious risk due to an EU exit, as the Republic will remain subject to EU law and rights for workers will undoubtedly change and develop over time in response to changes in EU law.

By contrast, if NI is outside the EU and is not subject to EU law, rights for workers here will not develop in the same way. The UK Government have repeatedly stated a desire for the UK to no longer be subject to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, limiting the ability of workers in NI to take action against the state or their employer

and meaning that workers' rights in NI will not develop in line with the decisions of the court. The UK continues to resist a 'level playing field' on workers' rights as part of the negotiations on a future relationship with the EU.

NI organisations express shock at the peace process being used as a bargaining chip in trade negotiations by UK government

It is increasingly clear that the Government has no commitment to the equality and human rights agreements which are core to the Good Friday Agreement, and which will be seriously undermined through exiting the EU. In this context, UNISON must continue to campaign to defend the Human Rights Act and a strong, enforceable Bill of Rights for NI must be brought forward.

The promise of guaranteed human rights in a strong, enforceable Bill of Rights has been systematically blocked not only by local political parties but by successive UK governments. Its continued rejection by the UK Government (due to the lack of local political consensus) is particularly irresponsible at this point in the Peace Process. A Bill of Rights for NI could be used to protect rights based in EU law in the future, and limit the power of Government to weaken those rights. It is now needed more than ever.

The 'New Decade, New Approach' agreement provides for the first process to implement the Bill of Rights in nearly 12 years. However, we are concerned that this process has departed from the letter and spirit of the Good Friday Agreement and could allow for the lack of political consensus to be used as a veto over implementation of a Bill of Rights. Alongside the Equality Coalition and Human Rights Consortium, we are engaging with the new Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights to ensure this does not occur.

Abortion rights: Last year we reported that Westminster passed the NI (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019. This act represented a hugely important development in relation to giving effect to a

women's right to choose and marriage equality in NI.

The campaign for abortion rights by UNISON and our allies has been a long-running one. For decades we have been part of a coalition which has campaigned, lobbied, protested, marched, researched, engaged in consultations, made presentations, listened to and published women's stories, pursued court action and supported the cause of over 1,000 women per year being forced to travel and pay for healthcare.

Section 9 of the 2019 Act meant that abortion was effectively de-criminalised in NI. It required the Secretary of State to make regulations giving effect to the 2018 UN CEDAW report on abortion rights in NI by 31st March 2020. UNISON gave evidence to CEDAW. The report found that the UK Government was responsible for grave and systemic human rights violations under the CEDAW Treaty for its continued criminalisation of terminations of pregnancy in NI and its failure to provide terminations in cases of serious foetal abnormality, rape and incest.



UNISON, alongside the wider trade union movement, and working particularly closely with the Royal College of Midwives, WRDA and Alliance for Choice, made a detailed submission in December 2019 to the NI Office consultation on the new regulations relating to the provision of abortion services. Despite our submission, we were disappointed by the final regulations (the Abortion (NI) Regulations 2020) which provide for abortions without conditionality up to 12 weeks, rather than 24 weeks as is the case in Britain.

Terminations can take place up to 24 weeks where continuing the pregnancy would lead to risk of physical or mental injury, a time limit we again opposed.

Unlike Britain however, this requires that two Doctors certify that this is the case, again a move which was opposed widely. Terminations of pregnancy are allowed on the grounds of serious foetal abnormality without a time limit, but time limits do apply in cases of rape and incest.

Despite these changes in the law coming into effect, we are very concerned that little appears to have been done to develop and commission a regional service model for the provision of terminations. Responsibility for this lies with the Department of Health, but it appears once more that political opposition is being used to frustrate the delivery of women's rights.

The Department has denied that it has responsibility to commission such services, and during Covid-19 no agreement was reached by the Executive on providing a limited early medical termination service. The lack of a regional service model has meant that the Northern HSC Trust has already indicated it may no longer be able to provide services moving forwards.

Via both the Equality Coalition and ICTU we are considering what actions to take alongside our allies to ensure women across NI have equal access to free, safe and legal health services. Requiring women to travel outside of NI during the course of the pandemic to access services would add a further cruel twist to what has been a shameful and tragic derogation of responsibility until now.

Marriage equality: UNISON activists have played a leading role in the Love Equality campaign for marriage equality. Section 8 of the 2019 Act required the Secretary of State to make regulations providing for equal marriage in NI by 13th January 2020.

The then Secretary of State, Julian Smith MP, did so and the first same-sex marriages occurred in February. Consultations then began on providing for the conversion of civil partnerships into same-sex marriages, and on providing for same-sex religious marriages.

We supported the Love Equality submissions to the NIO on these consultations. From 1st September, regulations now allow same-sex religious marriages to take place, whilst continuing to allow religious bodies and officiants to refuse to perform such marriages.

Regional Committee congratulates all UNISON activists and our allies that fought and campaigned over many years for these rights to be realised. However, the campaign to provide for the conversion of civil partnerships continues.



Supporting our allies: UNISON continues to make a major contribution to the debate on equality and human rights. With the support of the Campaign Fund, we sponsor research, seminars, public demonstrations and engage in political lobbying to reverse regression and to move forward.

We continue to develop the equality and human rights agenda with our allies in the Equality Coalition; the Human Rights Consortium; CAJ; NICRE and the Migrant Centre; and the Practice and Participation of Rights in particular, and report on key developments below.

■ The Equality Coalition - Challenging equality breach

The Equality Coalition is co-convened by UNISON and CAJ and has almost 100 member organisations. A number of these are themselves umbrella groups and the largest and most diverse is the trade union movement.

There has been, and remains, no other collective voice on equality in NI. There remains no other overarching consistent 'critical friend' of the equality oversight bodies, public authorities and local government.

This year with the continued support of the UNISON Campaign Fund, the Coalition has kept up its high levels of activity both refocusing work towards the equality implications of the pandemic and also dealing with the pre-pandemic priorities of the Coalition for 2020.

In relation to the Covid-19 pandemic the Equality Coalition monthly meetings were held virtually and became a key forum for information sharing and interventions between member groups on the pandemic impacts.

In April 2020 during the onset of the pandemic, the Coalition issued a joint "call for action to ensure inequalities are not exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis." This included addressing early the issue of human rights duties on public authorities to take all reasonable steps to protect lives, including those of all health and social care workers, and other essential workers; and addressing issues of PPE shortages and PPE that actually fits women.

The Coalition also called for:

- the implementation of a testing and contract testing programme in line with WHO standards;
- support for persons 'shielding';
- legal certainty over Covid restrictions, measures preventing evictions and providing social protection, including for migrant workers subjected to 'hostile environment' and 'no recourse to public funds' measures;
- steps to counter violence against women and broader domestic abuse in the Covid context;

- protection of essential public services during the pandemic – including reproductive health care and essential childcare provision.

Finally the joint plan raised the concern that the most vulnerable groups bore the brunt of the austerity invoked following banking bailout, calls on the UK government and NI Executive to take all steps possible to ensure this is not repeated in the aftermath of Covid-19.



The Coalition Co-conveners organisations UNISON and CAJ, with support from member groups took these issues forward through a series of interventions with member groups, that have included engagement at ministerial, departmental and Assembly level on the above matters and other emerging issues during the pandemic.

Regular engagement has also been held with the Equality and Human Rights Commissions. This included engagement on:

- the concerning policing response to the Black Lives protests;
- the failure of the Department of Health to commission abortion services despite the requirements of the law and the concerning concentration of power, with scant regard for the equality duty, under the Department's health transformation process during the pandemic;
- the education issues arising from the pandemic, and
- a joint call by the Co-Conveners and Amnesty International for a public inquiry into care home deaths during the pandemic.

The co-conveners and other member groups also contributed to the COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan led by the Women's Policy Group NI.

Other Coalition work strands have continued under the following headings:

Campaigning to ensure the realisation of 'rights based' power-sharing in the re-established Stormont institutions and promoting collective activism & solidarity: We took forward a body of work to seek progress on the rights based commitments in the 'New Decade, New Approach' deal to restore power-sharing, this included the Bill of Rights; an anti-poverty strategy based on objective need; a childcare strategy; the extension of mitigation measures against welfare reform, and their augmentation to cover the 'two child rule'.

There are also commitments to a number of equality based strategies, namely a Racial Equality Strategy; Disability Strategy; Gender Strategy; Sexual Orientation Strategy; Active Ageing Strategy & Children and Young People's Strategy, and age discrimination legislation in relation to goods, facilities and services.

Enforcement of the statutory duties on equality, rural needs, linguistic diversity etc: Through the Equality Duty Enforcement project we continued to make numerous interventions in the 'Section 75' equality duty and rural needs policy formulation processes, including in areas of linguistic diversity, the equality compliance of the NI budget, marriage equality, abortion rights, mental health services and many others. We also engaged providing briefings on minority language rights to Irish and Ulster Scots groups in relation to the legislation to establish language Commissioners.

Brexit - protecting the socio-economic rights of workers, communities and service users: The Coalition continued to facilitate a body of work in relation to the out-workings of Brexit including shaping the new powers of the Equality and Human Rights Commissions to oversee a UK commitment there will be 'no diminution' in some Good Friday Agreement rights as a result of Brexit. We also focused on the impacts on migrants here - furthering interventions to counter racial profiling and the sub-contracting of hostile environment measures to public sector staff due to the

new land border with the EU. We also focused engagement on the gaps in promised 'reciprocal rights' in health care, cross border working, education etc as part of the UK-Ireland Common Travel Area, and the interface between this and the EU settlement scheme.

Countering hate expression and incitement to hatred: Early in the year we held a packed Stormont launch of Coalition-commissioned report into 'Sectarianism: Key Facts' undertaken by Dr Robbie McVeigh, chaired by UNISON NI Regional Secretary Patricia McKeown.

This research has contributed to pushing for a facts and equality intervention-based approach to tackling sectarianism in line with international best practice, rather than an NI exceptionalist approach.

We continued to input and engage extensively with the judge-led NI Hate Crimes Review team led by Judge Marrinan. In particular, in addition to detailed submissions by the co-conveners we facilitated thematic discussions with Coalition members as to the inclusion of gender, with a focus on misogyny, and children and young persons within hate crimes framework.



We continued to work also on research into 'intervention' policy by public authorities to tackle racist, sectarian, homophobic, disablist and misogynistic expression in public space and to tackle the present largely 'non-intervention' policy. Whilst in part this has been held back due to the pandemic, we will complete and issue the report later in the year.

■ Conflict and dealing with the past

We reported last year on our call to the UK Government, Irish Government and all political parties to finally deal with a matter that is fundamental to peace and reconciliation in our society through enacting the series of measures within the Stormont House Agreement in a human rights compliant manner.

The 2014 Stormont House Agreement (SHA) provides for a new series of institutions to deal with the past, including a Historical Investigations Unit to investigate unresolved conflict-related deaths for all groups; an Independent Commission on Information Retrieval, and an Oral History Archive.

The NI Office (NIO) consulted on the legislation in 2018 and UNISON responded endorsing the submission of the Model Bill Team - a Joint Project between Queen's University Belfast, CAJ, and the Transitional Justice Institute of Ulster University.

A FRESH START THE STORMONT AGREEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

An agreement to consolidate the peace, secure stability, enable progress and offer hope

The UK Government then repeatedly reaffirmed its commitment to implement the SHA to the international community and domestically. The UK gave regular undertakings to the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers (who oversee duties to implement rulings at the European Court of Human Rights and are an entirely separate entity to the EU) that the UK would comply with its international human rights obligations and legislate for the SHA.

Following the General Election in December 2019 the new Conservative Government in its first 'Queens Speech' committed to the 'prompt implementation' of the SHA. In January 2020, in the 'New Decade, New Approach' deal to restore power sharing to Stormont, the UK government committed to the introduction of the SHA legislation 'within 100 days'.

Despite all of this, on the 18th March 2020 the Secretary of State for NI announced the unilateral abandonment of the SHA and instead set out an unclear 'fast track' alternative that will not comply with human rights obligations and is highly likely to be unlawful.

The NIO Statement was made on the same day - and explicitly linked - to legislation introduced into Westminster that will limit the ability to prosecute British soldiers for war crimes abroad (including torture and extrajudicial killings) which has caused grave concern among human rights organisations.

Despite the passage of time since March the NIO is yet to provide any further clarification at all as to what its policy intentions are in relation to the legacy of the NI conflict, creating further uncertainty for victims and survivors.

UNISON membership encompasses victims and survivors of the conflict from all groups. The Peace Agreement promise to address their issues was a key factor in their support for it. The current approach to dealing with the past and the legacy of the conflict is not working and in particular is not delivering for victims and survivors. The bad faith from the NIO including its willingness to break international commitments and legal obligations has further compounded the present situation.

■ Bill of Rights and Human Rights Consortium

UNISON continues to be represented on the Consortium Board by Thomas Mahaffy.

Bill of Rights: Throughout 2019 the Consortium continued to lobby for a renewal of the Bill of Rights process. When the talks to restore the NI Assembly restarted in late 2019, these efforts intensified with targeted interventions with political parties, the UK and Irish Governments and key stakeholders. In January 2020, provision was eventually made in the 'New Decade, New Approach' deal for an Ad-Hoc Assembly Committee to look at the creation of a Bill of Rights.

The Consortium has been positively engaging with this Committee since its first meeting in March, including identifying local and international academics to present evidence. The Consortium has also engaged with Assembly clerks and the Assembly Engagement office on its future work programme and opportunities for civil society representatives to present their perspectives.



The Consortium also convened a Bill of Rights working group in March 2020 to ensure participation from its members and wider civil society in the Ad-Hoc Committee's work and to review and renew civil society leadership of public facing campaigning for a Bill of Rights in the longer term.

Brexit: Our Brexit and Human Rights Working Group (BHRWG) has been an important vehicle to continue to share updates and intelligence on the latest Brexit developments and collaborate on joint activities across the spectrum of its membership.

The Consortium continues to strategically partner with NICVA, UNISON and NUS/USI in the NoToNoDeal campaign and continues to work with UNISON, CAJ and others to lobby Congress to ensure the Good Friday Agreement is protected in trade discussions.



In October 2019 the Consortium's analysis of the EU/UK Withdrawal Agreement and NI Protocol was shared with the BHRWG, its members and the public. This also informed the Consortium's detailed analysis of the draft EU Withdrawal Bill. Since June the Consortium have continued to analyse Government proposals including the Internal Market Bill which would undermine the rule of law and the protection of rights within the Good Friday Agreement, the Withdrawal Agreement and NI Protocol.

It has also worked in close collaboration with other Brexit focussed coalitions across the UK both in its lobbying, advocacy and awareness raising. Most recently it has partnered with the Brexit Civil Society Alliance, the Wales Governance Centre and the Scottish Human Rights Consortium to begin a series of webinars on the broad theme of Brexit, Devolution and Rights.

Covid-19: In response to the massive range of human rights issues created and exacerbated by Covid-19, the Consortium has developed a number of initiatives. For example, it has established a database of human rights violations that seeks to compile information about rights infringements experienced in NI, (including Covid-19), how international human rights law is being breached and how a Bill of Rights could help. This will provide an ongoing evidence base for the rights implications of Covid and will be an advocacy tool for its Bill of Rights work.

In addition the Consortium has partnered with the Equality Coalition, the Transitional Justice Institute and Ulster University to plan

and deliver a webinar series entitled 'Covid Conversations: Human Rights in a Pandemic' and to date have focussed on areas such as caring, social security, access to the courts, domestic abuse, Black Lives Matter and childcare.

Planning is underway for further topics to be covered in the series including Brexit, food, digital poverty, the Feminist Recovery Plan and the climate emergency. These webinars have been well attended by a wide audience including civil society, government officials, academics and interested individuals.



They feed into the Bill of Rights work both by encouraging the public to use rights as the lens through which to view these issues and by highlighting the gaps that exist in the

absence of domestic enforcement of rights through a bill of rights.

Interestingly, feedback received from these webinars has suggested that most attendees would not have been able to attend the event if it was held in a physical venue rather than online. Reasons given included disability and the time taken to travel, amongst other factors. This suggests that the Consortium has been able to continue to effectively transmit the idea of the importance of rights, despite restrictions placed upon us all by the pandemic.

Northern Ireland Human Rights Festival: The 2019 festival ran from the 8th to 14th December and contained 45 events across Belfast and other parts of NI. The response rate and feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive with 81% of attendees feeling that events they attended were either very helpful or extremely helpful in increasing their knowledge or understanding of human rights. Similarly, 87% of those attending felt that the festival had made them think about the relationship between human rights and issues in their own communities.

■ Participation and the Practice of Rights

UNISON NI continues to work in partnership with the Participation and Practice of Rights (PPR) organisation founded by former Regional Secretary Inez McCormack. Thomas Mahaffy, Head of Organising & Development, represents UNISON on the Board.

PPR works on social and economic rights issues and puts human rights principles and tools at the service of marginalised communities. PPR continues to work with UNISON branches as well as providing training as part of the UNISON regional education programme.

Build Homes Now/Equality Can't Wait: As part of the campaign to build an eco-village, including public and co-operative housing for low-income families, at the Mackies site in West Belfast, Build Homes Now hosted the world renowned Yes Men in Belfast in early 2020. The Yes Men, PPR and Build Homes



Now delivered a week of activist sessions in partnership with The Mac and staged a series of public actions. A coalition of planners, architects, sustainability experts, economists and housing campaigners have formed a Take Back the City coalition to support the campaign at Mackies.



Roger Dam, presents his new, hoax, plans for Belfast

#123GP/Mental Health Rights Movement:

#123GP organised NI's first Mental Health Rights Congress in October 2019, attended by over 100 people with direct experience and supportive organisations to develop a campaign plan. The Congress was addressed by the UN Special Rapporteur for the Right to Health. In January 2020 we published a letter in the two major newsprint outlets, signed by over 200 prominent figures across the island of Ireland from the worlds of sport, entertainment and civil society supporting the #123GP campaign to double funding for counselling and introduce counselling waiting time targets.

Following inaction from the Health Minister, activists interrupted the December 2019 Public Health Agency board meeting with a festive 'flash-mob' performing a carol and staged a lunch-time action outside the Health and Social Care Board (March 2020) with over 80 people releasing hand held alarms for one-minute.

Housing4All: In response to the #BlackLivesMatter movement, Housing4All and PPR held an 'Ending the Hostile Environment: Advancing the Right to Work for Asylum Seekers' webinar examining progressive steps being taken by the Dublin and Holyrood administrations in response to sustained campaigns from social movements. A local #LiftTheBan campaign will be launched in late 2020.

Making Rights Real: PPR are supporting the formation of Making Rights Real – an organisation seeking to use a human rights-

based approach with marginalised communities across Scotland. Making Rights Real is supported by Amnesty, Scotland Human Rights Consortium, Scottish Human Rights Commission and other community and voluntary organisations.

Covid-19 Emergency Response: www.nlb.ie:

PPR launched a new platform (to be relaunched in October 2020) No-one Left Behind which tracked state policies during the Covid-19 emergency, community-based responses and provided a platform for progressive organisations to promote recovery policies which promoted public health and ecological sustainability. Alongside www.nlb.ie, PPR also launched www.corporatenetworks.org as a resource for activists to research private companies registered with the UK's Companies House.



Visit site: www.nlb.ie

Internet 4 All: In response to the emerging digital divide which became exacerbated under Covid-19, PPR worked with communities across Ireland to launch an Internet 4 All campaign asking both administrations in the Dáil and Stormont to work with telecommunications providers to guarantee free and dependable internet provision for everyone, in particular marginalised and rural communities with poor infrastructure.

Homes Not Voiceless: PPR have worked alongside youth from Playboard to survey and map out Wi-Fi provision in publicly funded residential facilities (e.g. hostels) and are launching a campaign to secure open Wi-Fi access in any facility funded by the public in late 2020.

■ Migrant Centre NI (MCNI)

The Migrant Centre NI is Chaired by UNISON's Pamela Dooley and we are also represented on the Board by Local Organiser, Nathalie Donnelly. MCNI was established in 2012 to protect the rights of migrant workers in NI and provides a range of advice and advocacy services, good relations work, capacity building and leadership development projects.

The **belonging project** is multimedia photography project that facilitates discussions about identity, migrant experiences and community in a safe environment. Through this project MCNI also provide an OCN accredited training for facilitators from the migrant community.

The **race hate crime advocacy service** works in partnership with the PSNI, Department of Justice, Victim Support, The Rainbow Project and Leonard Cheshire NI to raise awareness, increase the reporting of race hate crime, and provide person-centred support.



MCNI Hate Crime Team, Nikki Yau & Radovan Barensky

In the past year, the service has dealt with 757 victim referrals, the majority of which are formal referrals from the PSNI.

The **'LAVA' leadership training project** delivers a tailored leadership training and development programme and will explore the lived experience of existing leaders and their work across the world in countries emerging from conflict. The project has 12 participants and has hosted training sessions for the cohort of LAVA Leaders to actively engage with policy issues on women's rights, human rights and Brexit. The project also

held capacity-building governance training for the MCNI board.



The **Coolcullen Meadows Project**, resourced by Apex Housing and based in Fermanagh, is working with local residents on an exciting new project to establish a community house. It aims to encourage meaningful dialogue and mutual understanding between residents and surrounding communities

MCNI, in partnership with Advice NI, is supporting vulnerable EU citizens who need additional help when applying for their immigration status through the **Home Office EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS)**. This includes

- direct help for vulnerable EU citizens through phone advice, advice drop-in clinics and appointments;
- information sessions for community groups, businesses, statutory bodies and other organisations;
- dissemination of information.

From the beginning of the project in April 2019 the team of Advisers have dealt with 3168 people, and 1116 people have attended information sessions.

Over the 18-month period from 1st January 2019 to 31st August 2020, MCNI has provided advice and support to 3877 clients, dealing with 5169 individual cases overall. Of these cases 31% were related to Race Hate Crime issues including formal referrals of victims from the PSNI to the Hate Crime Advocacy Project who wished to receive Advocacy Support, internal referrals between projects, self-referrals and referrals from the wider community and voluntary sector including the BAME sector.

■ Women at work and in society

Discrimination against women: The 8th periodic review of the UK with regard to adherence to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) took place in February 2019, at the UN headquarters in Geneva. Regional Committee supported the CAJ formal submission to the CEDAW Committee in advance of this session.

Through ICTU, we were also party to the submissions from women's organisations. ECNI and the NI Human Rights Commission submitted shadow reports.

Issues highlighted by the CEDAW Committee for special and urgent attention by the UK Government within 2 years were:

- a resolution on abortion inequality in NI;
- a thorough impact assessment of the impact of the UK's withdrawal from the EU on the rights of women;
- the establishment of an oversight mechanism to monitor compliance with human rights; and
- ensuring that loss of EU funding doesn't lead to gaps in women's services by securing alternative funding.

Other specific areas highlighted to the UK Government included the need for measures:

- to counter incitement to hatred on the grounds of gender; and
- to ensure women's full and equal participation in public and political life – the gender related impact of the NI conflict.

As can be seen from the body of this report, the UK has failed to action the majority of recommendations and although it did act to introduce legislation on abortion, our devolved Government has failed to introduce regulations.

UNISON continues to use these concluding recommendations in lobbying and litigation on all relevant areas of non-compliance.

We continue to lag behind Scotland and Wales on legislation outlawing domestic violence and sexual abuse, and legislation on social and economic rights. NI has the lowest provision for childcare and women and children have borne the greatest impact of welfare cuts. In its incitement to hatred legislation, unique to NI, women are excluded.

In the absence of regulations, we continue to pursue gender pay reporting by employers. Women are still concentrated in lower paid, lower status, often part-time work. They have higher rates of economic inactivity due to family and home commitments. They are the greatest losers in the event of cuts to the welfare system. They form 82% of UNISON NI's membership.



Abortion: In February 2018 the vice chair of CEDAW stated, *"The situation in NI constitutes violence against women that may amount to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment"*.

In October 2019 the UK parliament finally made the historic move to introduce decriminalisation in NI and implemented the recommendations from the CEDAW inquiry.

The focus then shifted to the regulations that would govern decriminalisation. These were contained in the Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2020 published in March this year. Whilst UNISON welcomed the regulations in general there were problematic omissions that contravened the CEDAW recommendations. These included the failure of the regulations to establish buffer zones around clinics and the fact that they penalise health professionals who failed to follow them.

In the shadow of Covid-19, the implementation of the regulations by the Department of Health has stalled. Unlike GB and the Republic of Ireland, the Health Minister has refused to introduce telemedicine abortion services, thus contradicting WHO best practice advice during Covid-19. Further proposed contraventions include a requirement that the Executive Committee (ministerial group) approve the commissioning of abortion services.

Despite the absence of Ministerial approval, interim services have begun. Providers in sexual health clinics whose normal schedule of clinics had been suspended due to Covid-19, pivoted to providing early medical abortion (EMA) up until 9 weeks, 6 days gestation. Within the first two months of being operational, 350 women utilised the EMA service. Services for 10+ week gestations are offered, although not within all of the five health care trusts.

The absence of public information from the NI Department of Health means many need to rely on internet searches for information, which might lead individuals to the webpages of the activist group Alliance for Choice, but which could also lead to anti-abortion organizations masquerading as pregnancy crisis centres, which have similar counterparts in the US.

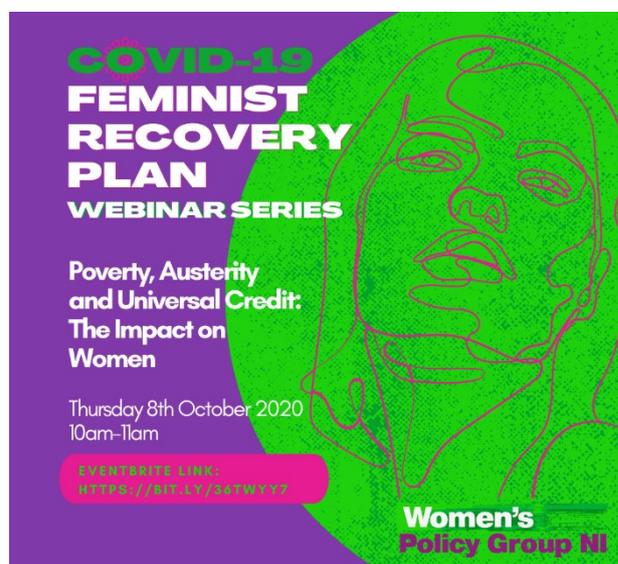
Women's movement: As evidenced by the report of our Women's Committee in Section 1, we continue to play our role in the wider women's movement on a host of initiatives aimed at highlighting the multiple discriminations faced by women in our society. As UNISON we also bring the issue to the table with employers and have made women's rights a key demand for supporting the return of devolved Government.

Women's Policy Group - Feminist recovery plan: We support the recommendations in the recent Feminist recovery plan developed by the Women's Policy Group. The Plan

recognises that women in NI in have suffered immensely due to a decade of austerity, and any Covid-19 recovery cannot come to the detriment of women's equality and economic well-being.

The WPG is calling on decision-makers across the UK to take action to ensure a gender-sensitive crisis response as we transition from crisis response to recovery. Not only does this crisis have a disproportionate impact on women, but that impact is worsened for women from particular backgrounds: for instance, black and racialised women, disabled women, women with caring responsibilities, and LGBT women.

The emergency action required, and any recovery programme put in place, must meaningfully take into consideration the institutionalised inequalities that exist within Northern NI, and must co-develop a roadmap forward with the communities affected.



Impact of conflict on women: We continue to press the UK Government to include women in NI in its action plans for the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 on women in conflict. This will again be one of our core demands in our forthcoming UNISON manifesto for the General Election and any future Assembly elections.

Solidarity

■ UNISON Solidarity Group

Our first message to all branches is please renew your affiliation to Justice for Colombia (JFC) and Trade Union Friends of Palestine (TUFPP). Now, more than ever, we need trade union solidarity with workers and people in struggle.

Throughout the past year, the members of our UNISON NI Solidarity Group have been deeply involved in a wide variety of initiatives which have increased during lockdown.

November 2019 was a particularly active period for the Group with both the annual joint UNISON regional seminar and the highly successful Dublin conference on the rights of Palestinian children.

Despite lockdown, members of the Group have been very active in participating in online initiatives including those organised through JFC and TUFPP in co-ordination with ICTU Global Solidarity.

The Group has also hosted a range of UNISON activity through social media platforms, including seminars and film nights.

Currently our branches are participating in an appeal to fundraise for PPE for Gaza and the occupied territories which is being endorsed by ICTU throughout Ireland and co-ordinated by TUFPP. Regional Committee is encouraging all branches to donate.

We continue to be involved in other global solidarity work through our Group, our self-organised groups and branches including:

- support from our Women's Committee for the campaign against femicide in Turkey and the Turkish Government's rollback on women's rights in general on preventing and combatting violence against women;
- continued involvement in campaigns to support refugees and asylum seekers;
- continued support with humanitarian aid in zones hit by conflict or natural disasters, most recently Beirut;
- continued work on climate change and a sustainable environment; and
- participation in the Clean Clothes Campaign and Labour Behind the Label.

■ Cuba

We continue to work with the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. Work on the health service initiative to employ Cuban doctors and other health professionals was stalled due to the pandemic but we have now written to the new Chief Executive of the Belfast Trust to start movement in the model contract and to ensure that Cuba is added to the list of countries of interest for overseas recruitment.

Our Committee Chair, Conor McCarthy has met with the relevant Cuban Ambassador to Ireland who has assisted in this initiative. Credit for the initiative goes to the Royal

Victoria Hospital and Muckamore branch which is leading on the project.

Branches are encouraged to affiliate to the Cuban Solidarity campaign and to support their actions.



■ Palestine

Our Solidarity Group and the majority of branches continue to support TUFPP as our main vehicle for delivering solidarity actions in support of the Palestinian people. Down Education branch and the RVH and Muckamore branch continue to support projects in the Aida camp.

Both branches, along with Orchard, South & East Belfast Health, NI Ambulance, Newry & Mourne Health and Belfast Education branches now have several branch Ambassadors who have been promoting justice for Palestine and the BDS campaign throughout NI, at branch meetings, fringe meetings at trade union conferences and a range of solidarity events.

2019 Trade Union Ambassadors delegation: In October 2019 Women's Committee members Deborah Yapicioz and Catherine McKenna took part in the TUFPP delegation to Palestine along with others from a range of trade unions. The aim is to develop Palestinian solidarity work within unions and the focus of the 2019 delegation was on children, families and education. The delegates had many opportunities to spend time with local community groups run by women and met with Palestinian trade unions.

Unfortunately our 2 delegates were subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment on their return through Ben Gurion airport and we lodged protests with the Israeli Government. There is no doubt that this unwarranted action was deliberately designed to dissuade future delegations, but we are determined to continue supporting this important programme.



Our plans for further fringe meetings at ICTU conferences and other events to be hosted at the UNISON regional centre were postponed and replaced by virtual activity including hosting 2 important solidarity films, 'Killing Gaza' and 'This changes everything'. The Centre for Global Education partnered with the UNISON College to run a course 'Covid; We are all in this together' on the Impacts of Covid on communities across the globe.

Trade Union Friends of Palestine: We continue to support TUFPP with resources. The Regional Secretary is the Chair and UNISON member Eamonn McMahon is Secretary. UNISON branches and staff team members attend the main TUFPP meetings and Susan Neill (AO) and Caitlin Ni Chathail (RO) are key members of the TUFPP steering group.



Throughout the year TUFPP has organised physical and online activity including virtual links with Omar Barghouti (BDS). Dina Nasser and Jamal Juma spoke in September 2020 at the TUFPP event, 'Covid, colonialism and the people's resistance' and consequently an appeal is in operation across all unions seeking to raise £30,000 for PPE and medical support. Regional Committee and branches are actively supporting the appeal.

TUFPP is producing a regular newsheet updating trade unionist; advertising online activity and calls for action; and highlighting the continuing assault on the rights of Palestinian people and successes in the BDS campaign. Combined international solidarity activity resulted in the release of Mahmoud Nawajaa, General co-ordinator of the BDS campaign in Palestine who was wrongfully arrested by Israeli authorities.

Eamonn McMahon, founder member of TUFPP, is stepping back from the role of Secretary. We place on record our gratitude for his outstanding endeavours. Under his leadership TUFPP is now a globally recognised solidarity organisation and was itself a founder member

of the European Trade Union Network (ETUN) where UNISON continues to be the main union in the UK supporting the network.

The TUFPP Facebook site can be accessed at www.facebook.com/groups/1434904630117100/

■ Colombia

Branch affiliation to Justice for Colombia (JFC) is vital to ensure that its work can continue to keep an international spotlight on the killings and to push for real action on the peace agreement.



The assassination of trade unionists and human rights activists continues at a frightening rate and threatens the Peace Process. The Regional Secretary is a board member of JFC representing Ireland alongside the General Secretary of Forsa, Kevin Callanin. There have been a number of board meetings since last year's Regional Council with the next scheduled for late October. The June board meeting was addressed by Uber Ballesteros, CUT Executive Committee and FENSUAGRO and by Victoria Sandino, FARC Senator and peace negotiator.

The JFC website and Facebook pages contain invaluable information and videos for use by branches. A number of representatives from UNISON NI have now taken part in delegations to Colombia. In February 2020, the most recent Peace Monitor delegation included Irish representatives Margaret McKee, Chair of UNISON International Committee and Gerry Murphy, President of

ICTU. Josie Bird, UNISON President was also part of the delegation and chaired the subsequent seminar at the TUC.

In September, JFC invited UNISON NI members to participate in the online event 'Peace and Human Rights in Colombia'. The event took place during the TUC and was joined by trade unionists from a number of European countries. The event focused on Colombia's peace process which brought hope to millions of people. Its implementation is taking place in a human rights crisis that is seeing social and community leaders and former FARC guerrillas murdered at an alarming rate.

Jayder Quintana, union leader in FENSUAGRO was murdered on 3 October.

Anne Speed had met with him as part of last year's delegation. Through JFC and ICTU we have called on the Irish Government to intervene.

Reports of JFC activity can be accessed online at www.justiceforcolombia.org.



■ Latin America

We have renewed our affiliation to the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign. In October, UNISON activists participated in a webinar organised jointly by Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela Solidarity campaigns.

A link to the event, 'Fighting blockades & COVID-19: Why US sanctions in Latin America must end', can be found on Facebook.

www.facebook.com/LatinAmericaConference/videos/3092233690883205

Working in the wider trade union movement

■ ICTU

Our main work with other unions continues to be through the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and its Committees and in the NI-wide public sector negotiating bodies.



Executive Council of Congress and Standing Orders Committee: Patricia McKeown and Anne Speed were both re-elected to the Executive Council for a 2 year term ending in 2021. It is unclear whether the Biennial Conference scheduled for July 2021 will take place. The late Denis Keatings was re-elected to the Standing Orders Committee and this position stays vacant. UNISON's Archie Thompson represents ICTU retired members on the current Executive Council.

NIC/ICTU: The 2020 Northern conference has been twice postponed and may take place in 2021. However, elections proceeded and John Patrick Clayton is now part of the UNISON team on the NI Committee of Congress. It was agreed that the outgoing Committee and any newly elected members would form the NI Committee pro tem.

Both the NI Committee and the Executive Council have regular, virtual meetings and the UNISON team represents Congress on a range of groups, some established to deal specifically with the Government response to the pandemic. We continue to support ICTU campaigns including the latest 'No return to normal' campaign and we work on Just Transition in response to the climate emergency. Table 14 sets out UNISON involvement in the Congress.

Supporting Workers in Struggle: We continue to work with other unions and to support those in industrial struggle including the workers currently involved in the Debenhams dispute.

Trades Councils: Regional Committee continues to encourage UNISON activists to become involved in local Trades Councils.

May Day: The 2020 May Day was a series of virtual events replacing the traditional march. The Regional Secretary broadcast a May Day message and we kept up tradition by having a live jazz performance from Harry Hamilton of the Musicians' Union.

Events and seminars: Throughout the year, members and activists participated in ICTU virtual events, seminars and training programmes on a wide range of trade union priorities.

The Connolly Centre: In a special tribute to the late Denis Keatings, Féile invited the Regional Secretary to give the James Connolly Annual Lecture in August 2020.



Table 14 - UNISON representation on ICTU structures

ICTU Structure and purpose	UNISON representation
ICTU Executive ¹	Patricia McKeown; Anne Speed
NI Committee, ICTU ²	Patricia McKeown; John Patrick Clayton; Anne Speed
ICTU Equality & Human Rights Group ³	Patricia McKeown
ICTU Standing Orders Committee	Denis Keatings (until May 2020)
ICTU Women's Committee ⁴	Margaret McKee and Danielle McCusker (Vice Chair)
ICTU Health Services Committee ⁵	Anne Speed (Chair); Patricia McKeown; Joe McCusker; Denis Keatings (until May 2020); Maura McKenna
ICTU Education TU Group ⁶	Anne Speed (Chair); Heather McKinstry
ICTU Public Services Group	RMT, senior lay reps and regional organisers
ICTU Private Sector group	RMT
ICTU Disability Committee ⁷	Mandy Rutherford; Michelle McCune
ICTU Black and Minority Ethnic Committee	Patrick Yu
ICTU LGBT Committee ⁷	Fidelma Carolan
ICTU Retired Members	Archie Thomson, Angela Boorman
ICTU Youth Forum ⁷	Emer Kelly; Lorna McLarnon
ICTU Education Officers Group ⁸	Caitlin Ni Chathail
ICTU Health & Safety Committee ⁷	Emma Jane Cullen; Ray Rafferty
ICTU Solidarity Committee	Kevin Hillick; Conor McCarthy; Eamon McMahan (TUIP)
ICTU Education alliance ⁹	Anne Speed and nominated reps

1 Main policy making body – all island

2 Main policy making body for NI

3 NICICTU sub-committee on full range of equality and human rights policies and practices

4 Advisory Committee to NIC and jointly with Women's Committee RI to Executive Council on women's rights and participation

5 Main health policy committee for NI. Reports to NIC

6 Main education policy committee for NI. Reports to NIC.

7 Advisory Committee to NIC

8 Liaison group for all NI TU education officers

9 Campaign group on education policy in NI comprising TUs and affiliates.



Objective 4

Regional
resources &
management

Developing and
efficient & effective
union



Finance & managing resources

■ Summary Accounts – Lay Activity Fund

The audited regional accounts for the year ending 31 December 2019 will be distributed to all branches and delegates to Regional Council 2020.

The UNISON NI lay activity budget for 2019 was £100,939.08. The allocation for 2020 is £102,192.92, representing a 0.9% increase on the previous year. At the start of each year the budget for all categories of lay activity is set by Regional Committee and reviewed on a quarterly basis.

The Regional Committee made a number of donations in line with UNISON policy. Where appropriate, branches are invited to

support the relevant project or cause. A total of £2,950 was donated to projects through the following organisations:

- Jose Venzer Samson (Filipino Christmas fund);
- TUFPP (Palestinian Children’s Conference);
- Reclaim the Agenda;
- Cork Mother Jones;
- Pancreatic Cancer;
- Gaza appeal;
- Medical Aid for Palestine .

Regional Committee also affiliated to a total of 13 organisations in 2019/2020 at a cost of £1,780.

■ Branch finance

Two branches were late with their AFR submissions but, as this coincided with lockdown, the late submissions were accepted within rule. As NDC was postponed in 2020 there were no non-attendance penalties levied.

As a result of lockdown, the auditors were unable to travel to UNISON regions to conduct their normal branch audits. To ensure good branch accounting, designated branches were contacted and asked to forward their accounts to the audit department for analysis.

To date 3 NI branches were contacted and have responded to this request.



■ Income and RMS

During the current pandemic, a major priority has been to monitor employers to ensure that their payroll systems continue to collect unions subs and that membership applications are processed. These are centralised functions in NI.

Total income returned to Head Office increased to £4,372,721.26. This represents a 3.6 % increase on the previous year. Total income returned to branches for 2019 increased to £1,120,848. This represents a 6.8% increase on the previous year.

■ Premises

In Mid-March, the Covid-19 pandemic led to the closure of all UNISON offices, including the UNISON Centre in Belfast and the North West Support Centre. The offices remain closed awaiting a change in guidance from the NI Government.

Galway House: Prior to lockdown we continued to host a series of events for lay structures, partner organisations and external users including:

- Four Seasons;
- NI Migrant Centre;
- Equality Coalition;
- NI Housing Executive.

Although agreement was secured from HQ to begin redevelopment work on Galway House, this has been delayed due to the pandemic. However, this work will commence as soon as is feasible.

North West Support Centre: Prior to March, the NW Support Centre continued to be the prime venue for UNISON branches in the North West. It also remains the location for the NI Migrant Centre as part of our partnership arrangements with them. External organisations who regularly used the centre included Derry Trades Council and the Polish Consulate. A long-term strategy for the Derry premises is under development



A training session in the NW Support Centre

■ Environmental sustainability

We continue to implement UNISON's green policy in the management of our premises and throughout our administrative systems.

Prior to lockdown we piloted dispatching a number of AGM's by email which was a huge success in terms of reducing our carbon footprint and reducing postage and

printing costs. This footprint was also reduced by default as a result of lockdown, due to the major reduction in mileage and reduced usage of electricity and gas. Our plans for the re-fit of Galway House includes sustainable environmental features which were not previously available to us.

■ Administrative systems and front-line communication

In-house systems and protocols: The closure of the UNISON NI offices and the move to homeworking across the staff team necessitated the development of new systems and protocols to meet the changing needs of staff, our activists and our 45,000 members.

A business continuity plan was prepared with an assessment of our critical and non-critical activities and how we would maintain services to members and activists. Critical activities included:

- carrying out continuing Covid-19 risk assessments to identify potential hazards and control measures related to contagion spread;
- ensuring the ongoing protection of the staff team using relevant health & safety protocols and guidance;
- facilitating homeworking for all staff;
- maintaining communications with activists and members, and ensuring their ongoing member engagement and participation, using online communication platforms and social media.

IT equipment & systems: The expected rollout of new computers has been delayed due to the ongoing closure of the UNISON Centre but speedy online migration to new systems and platforms has resolved most issues.

UNISON Direct: UNISON Direct closed in March with a limited number of staff working from home. This led to an increased number of calls to the UNISON Centre. These are redirected to reception staff and members of the admin staff for onward referral to branches or the organising team. UNISON Direct has reopened but we continue to contact all new joiners.

UNISON NI Website: Our website is updated daily with UNISON NI news and information. In December, a new strike action page was added including details of all strike schedules, times and location for each week of action. There was also a link to a strike action gallery on Facebook. During lockdown, the website was updated regularly with coronavirus guidance and new pages were set up with health and safety guidance tailored for specific sectors.



We are currently redesigning the website to make it easier for members to navigate and find useful information. A new 'what we do' page should encourage new members to join and we will shortly be launching a new 'where you work' section for sector specific general information. There has also been a specific policy submissions page and events page with photos added. Between 23 March and 31

August the website was updated 196 times with over 50,000 page views.

Facebook: As at 31st August, we have 10,489 followers on our Facebook page – an 87% increase from 2019. Between 23 March and 31 August our 251 posts were seen over 1 million times (1,060,894 views) and 83,354 people liked, shared or commented on one of our posts. We are by far the most 'liked' Facebook page for any union in NI.

Facebook was updated regularly during the health strike to encourage ballot returns, give information to members about the ballot, upcoming action, as well as strike action photos. We continue to generate between 2-4 posts each day. We also add new content to communicate with members. UNISON College NI runs online webinars for courses and Facebook live film nights. We plan monthly reminder posts for members to update their details with RMS.

Twitter - @UNISONNI: We have 3,246 followers on Twitter - a 30% increase from 2019. We are frequently tagged by other organisations about news and events which helps to connect people with our profile. Between 23 March and 31 August our tweets had 133,095 total views, we had 4,169 individual visits to the twitter page and had been mentioned in 880 tweets from other twitter pages.

We mostly use our Twitter page to engage with the media and other organisations whereas our Facebook page is where we get most engagement from our members.

Email communication with branches and members: Our database of up to date email addresses and phone numbers for members continues to grow. This has proven even more beneficial during the current period with a substantial increase in the information sent out to our members by text and email.

Distribution and print: The Regional Centre in Belfast maintained a service for branches to circulate newsletters during AGM season.

Staffing

Regional Committee records its thanks to our staff for all their work throughout 2019/2020.

Fidelma Carolan (Regional Organiser Education) left in January 2020 and Caitlin Ni Chathail was appointed to the post shortly afterwards.

The 2019/2020 Fighting Fund ended in February 2020 and we extend thanks and farewell to 8 of the 11 temporary staff who

were appointed as Fighting Fund Local Organisers - Noeleen Beattie, Deirdre Cousins, Sean Fairley, James Larmour, Angela Gribben, Jenny Johnston, Orlaith McCarthy, and Janet Orr.

Of the 3 remaining FFLOs, Gemma Curran has returned to her substantive post of Receptionist (PT) and both Noreen Robinson and Claire Bolt were appointed as temporary Area Organisers, covering for vacant posts.

Our current staff team is:

Administration

- Michele Bradford - Regional administrator
- Tracy Bryson - Secretary (PT)
- Caroline Butler - Building maintenance and catering
- Anne Campbell - Team support
- Gemma Curran - Receptionist (PT)
- Alison Downey - Receptionist (PT)
- Deirdre Graham - RMS supervisor
- Shelley King - Secretary (PT)
- Roslyn McCartney - RMS clerk
- Norma Neal - Secretary (PT)
- Brenda Peel - RMS clerk
- Liz Robinson - Senior Secretary

Specialist Staff

- John Patrick Clayton - Policy officer
- Sharrona Loughins - Communications Assistant

Regional Management Team

- Patricia McKeown - Regional Secretary
- Anne Speed - Head of Bargaining and Representation
- Thomas Mahaffy - Head of Organising & Development

Organising

- Clair Bolt – Area Organiser (Temporary)
- Marianne Buick - Regional Organiser (Temporary)
- Nuala Conlon - Regional Organiser
- Nathalie Donnelly - Local Organiser
- Danielle McCusker - Area Organiser
- Joe McCusker - Regional Organiser
- Susan Neill - Area Organiser
- Caitlin Ni Chathail - Regional Organiser, Education
- Noreen Robinson – Area Organiser (Temporary)



A tribute to Denis Keatings by Regional Secretary, Patricia McKeown

It was with great sadness that in April we reported the death of our much loved friend and comrade Denis Keatings, Joint Regional Convenor of UNISON NI. He will be greatly missed by generations of UNISON members whose causes he championed throughout his entire working life.

Denis joined NUPE in the 1970s and was part of the historic struggle known as the Winter of Discontent, when public service workers engaged in sustained strike action for pay justice. For his fearless leadership Denis was soon elected as Convenor of the Mater Hospital, then part of the NUPE's largest branch, North & West Belfast District Health Branch, covering the Mater, the Royal Victoria Hospitals and social services across the North and West of the city.

He campaigned for equal pay for the women cleaners, successfully spearheaded the fight against privatization of catering and cleaning services at the Mater and supported our members through some of the darkest times of 'the Troubles'.

In 1993 UNISON was born and the Mater Hospital became a union branch in its own right. Denis was immediately elected Branch Secretary, a position he would be continuously returned to for more than 20 years until, having won the confidence of the entire membership of UNISON in Northern Ireland, he was elected as our Joint Regional Convenor.

Denis was a trade unionist to his core. He wanted nothing more than justice and fair treatment for our members and they in turn loved him for it. We all did. He was a big, fearless, loyal fighter with a generous heart. There was no task he would not tackle, serving the members in the workplace, across Northern Ireland, at UNISON UK level and in the ICTU.

He tackled injustice wherever he found it, whether it was the denial of workers rights, death threats against health workers, attempts to downgrade his beloved Mater Hospital, the plight of the homeless in North Belfast or the plight of the Palestinian People.

We are proud to call Denis a UNISON activist. We pay tribute to the enormous contribution he has made to our union. We will miss him deeply. We send our love to his partner Elaine and his whole family.



A tribute to Denis Keatings by General Secretary, Dave Prentis

In May our union lost one of our most passionate and dedicated activists, and a longstanding and loyal friend to me. Denis Keatings has been active in our union from its inception, as branch secretary of Mater Hospital Branch and more recently as Joint Regional Convenor for Northern Ireland.

Denis was a lifelong champion for working people, constantly seeking to advance the cause of public service workers, whether within UNISON or across Northern Ireland. He was loved, admired and respected by his fellow members, activists and friends for decades – in UNISON and in NUPE.

In that time, Northern Ireland went through the Troubles and an unprecedented period of change – but throughout Denis was a constant within our union. Always kind, and always decent.

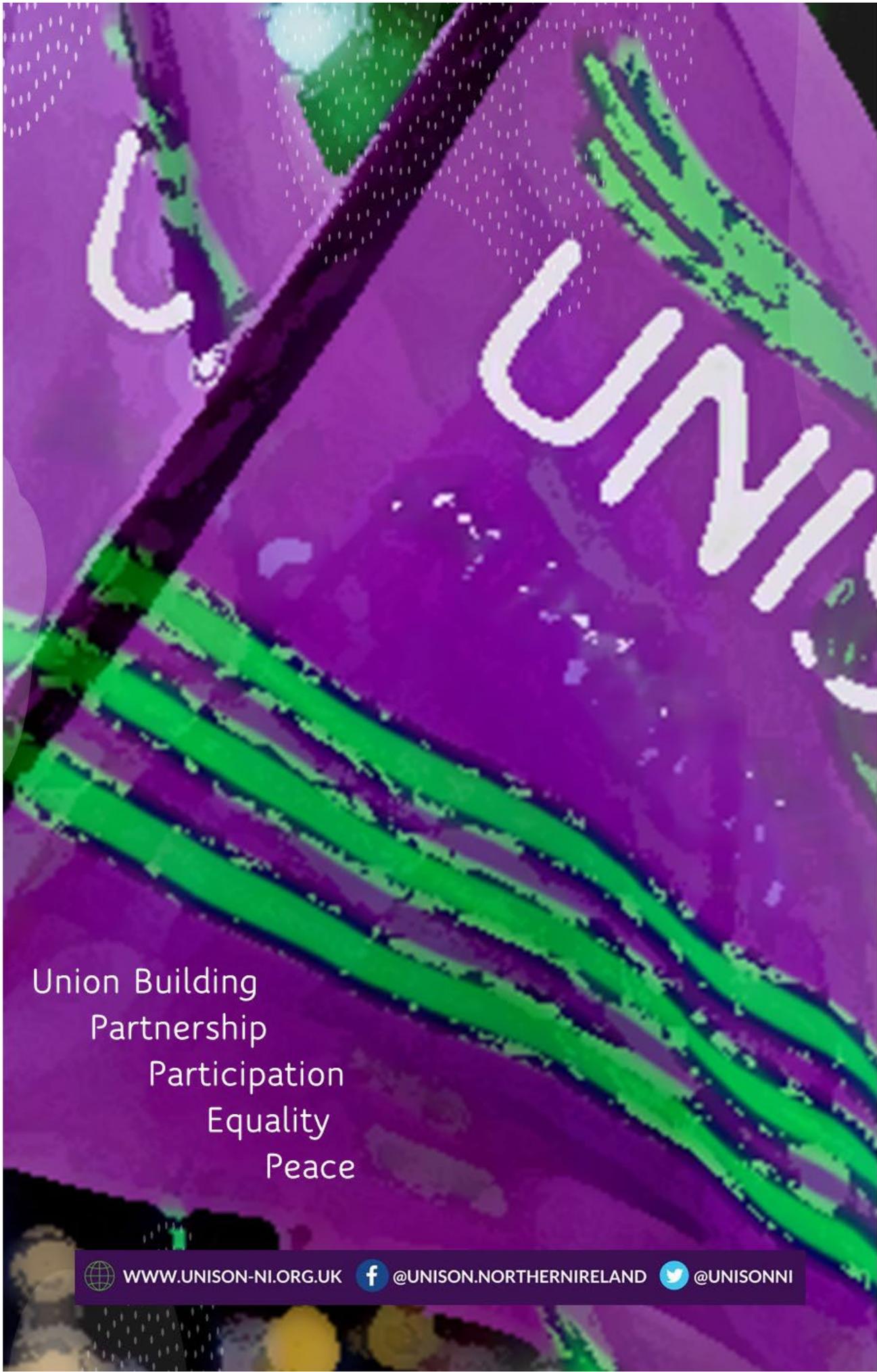
That kindness and decency always drove him to speak out on the causes that mattered most to him, because when he saw injustice, he could not stand by, he knew that to change things we have to act.

We will all miss Denis – especially within Northern Ireland, but also within the wider UNISON family.

We will never forget him, or the massive impact he has had on the lives of our members – but we will always be grateful for everything that he gave to our union and our movement.

Our thoughts and our love are all with his partner Elaine and his family.





Union Building
Partnership
Participation
Equality
Peace



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