



ANNUAL REPORT

The work of the NI Regional
Committee 2022 - 2023



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Who's Who on the Regional Committee in 2022/2023

Joint Regional Convenors

Stephanie Greenwood ⁽¹⁾	Higher Clerical Officer, Antrim Area Hospital
Kevin Hillick ⁽²⁾	Caretaker, Poleglass Youth Club, Belfast
James Large ⁽³⁾	Pharmacy Technician, Ulster Hospital, Belfast
Noreen Robinson ⁽⁴⁾	Classroom Assistant, St Catherine's PS, Strabane

Committee Members

Flora Alfante	Nursing Auxiliary, Craigavon Area Hospital
Olive Barry	Retired Members Forum
Aine Brennan	Medical Secretary, Mater Hospital, Belfast
Catherine Connell-Tierney	Theatre Assistant, Musgrave Park Hospital, Belfast
Gillian Ewart	Healthcare Assistant, Lurgan Hospital
Gillian Foley	Domiciliary Care Worker, Church Street, Newtownards
Jean Getty	Homecare Worker, Community Services, Magherafelt
Irene Graham	Nursery Assistant, Oldpark Nursery School, Belfast
Sonia Graham	Care Assistant, Ardview House, Downpatrick
Kim Hall	Domestic Assistant, Causeway Hospital, Coleraine
Clair Hardy	Housekeeper, Causeway Hospital, Coleraine
Daphne Hutchinson	Cleaner Supervisor, Craigavon Senior High School
Mary Lyttle	Homecarer, Spruce House, L/Derry
Niall McCarroll	Deputy Manager, First Housing, L/Derry
Conor McCarthy ⁽⁵⁾	Radiographers Helpers, Royal Hospitals, Belfast
Martin McConnellogue	Manager, First Housing - Jefferson Court, L/Derry
Maura McKenna	Staff Side Officer
Catherine McKillen	Healthcare Support Worker, Royal Hospitals, Belfast
Roisin McKinley	Cook, Youth Justice Agency, Bangor
Heather McKinstry	TU Sude Officer, Education Authority, Armagh
Anne McVicker	Director, Women's Resource Development Agency, Belfast
Marie Meredith	Childcare Assistant, Ionad Uibh Gachach, Belfast
Alan Philson	Nurse, Waterside Hospital, L/Derry
Martin Philson	Support Services Assistant, Altnagelvin Hospital, L/Derry
Grant Preshur	Service Assistant, Ulster Hospital, Dundonald
Rosena Robinson	Homecare Worker, Domiciliary Care Services (SEHSCT)
Amanda Rutherford	Care Assistant, Northfield House, Donaghadee
Amanda Sweetlove	Emergency Medical Technician, NIAS Headquarters, Belfast
Anne Taggart	Catering Assistant, Holy Child PS, Andersonstown, Belfast
Marjorie Trimble	Disability Committee
Jill Weir	Ward Clerk, South West Acute Hospital, Enniskillen
Melanie Wright	Catering Supervisor, Breda Academy, Belfast
Deborah Yapicioz	Social Worker, St Luke's site, Armagh

NEC Members in Attendance

Alastair Long	Ambulance Personnel, Larne Ambulance Depot
Margaret McKee	Catering Assistant, Royal Hospitals, Belfast
Catherine McKenna	Catering Assistant/Bus Escort - Holy Child Primary School, Belfast

(1) Stephanie Greenwood elected as Joint Regional Convenor, March 2023 (2) Kevin Hillick elected as Joint Regional Convenor, August 2023 (3) James Large resigned from Regional Committee in March 2023 to join the staff team (4) Noreen Robinson resigned from Regional Committee in May 2023 to join the staff team (5) Conor McCarthy resigned from Regional Committee May 2023 to join the staff team.

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Introduction

Too many of our members are struggling every day to get the job done and make ends meet. They are courageous in the face of adversity and in their tens of thousands they have said 'enough is enough'.

In UNISON, they have rallied, marched and lobbied against much that is wrong in our society today. In their workplaces they have decided to use their ultimate weapon of protest and are either on strike or about to strike. We salute them.

It was not supposed to be like this. 25 years ago we had great hopes that our Peace Agreement would result in a fair and decent society, at the very least for the Peace Babies. Today the Peace Babies too are on strike. In our Annual Report we set out the work and achievements of our members, our democratic structures, and our staff team.

The union continues to work to improve our members' lives. We have many positive achievements through local bargaining, through the UNISON College and our extensive education offer, and through self organisation and our work on equality and human rights.

Ultimately, we have been let down by our political system but we know, from decades of experience, that our members will continue to challenge and will ultimately succeed in changing society for the better.

That is what being part of a strong union is all about. That is why record numbers of workers are joining UNISON. It is why we have become the largest union in Northern Ireland. That is why we have an agenda with solutions to many of the problems which beset our public services, particularly in health and education.

Our Regional Committee has worked throughout the year on the agenda set by Regional Council. Our branches, service groups and self organised groups have worked diligently to deliver for the members.

In the course of this year many new UNISON leaders have stepped forward as workplace stewards and branch officers, inspired by the determination of our members to continue the fight for justice.

We have also lost inspiring leaders - strong women like Pamela Dooley, our former Head of Organising who led us into UNISON and Rosaleen Davidson, hospital domestic, who led the fight for equal pay. We pay tribute to them and to the others who have gone before them. And on this the 25th anniversary of the Peace Agreement and the 10th anniversary of her death, we remember the inspirational role played by Inez McCormack.

We are their legacy.

Patricia McKeown,
Regional Secretary

Stephanie Greenwood,
Joint Regional Convenor

Kevin Hillick,
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 2022.

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 2023

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.



OBJECTIVE 1: BUILDING OUR UNION





Recruiting and organising

Our recruitment and organising achievements in 2022 and 2023

UNISON NI recruitment and organising strategy: This section reports on the progress of the Regional Committee recruitment and organising strategy to the end of 2022 and during 2023. We can celebrate that:



Our recruitment is increasing



Our total membership is growing



Our union-building agenda is working

Following the recruitment of almost 7000 new joiners in 2022, our progress has continued into 2023 and we have already reached our year-end target in only 8 months. This ongoing success has taken place despite the continued challenges facing the union, including the sustained pressure facing our activist base, major service cuts and reorganisation and the cost-of-living crisis.

Core to our progress since last Regional Council has been the tireless work of our branches, activists and staff team across all the elements of our strategy. Of particular significance has been the effective use of our campaigns, pay ballots and industrial action to engage with thousands of our members and potential members in face-to-face meetings across workplaces, all the while publicising our many successes.



Increased recruitment across sectors has also resulted from our special branch and regional initiatives in priority growth areas such as private social care, as well as our targeting of student nurses and other key occupational groups in health and education.



All this activity is supported by our Education Programme through UNISON College as well as through our use of new online tools & digital platforms to attract new joiners and encourage member involvement on workplace issues.

Our key challenge, however, continues to be to identify, recruit and train more stewards. The Branch Development Group is working with the staff team to continue to support branches to initiate a programme of physical and online meetings to support the election and re-election of stewards, and to increase cover across all areas and workplaces.

This challenge is also central to the new union-wide Organising to Win strategy.

The following page outlines the key components of the UNISON NI recruitment and organising strategy and some of our key achievements in 2022 and 2023 to date.

UNISON NI Recruitment Strategy 2023



Ensure that branch plans prioritise recruitment, organising, bargaining, campaigning and member engagement activities – including effective mapping

Maximise the use of regional and branch communications to publicise our successes and increase our visibility as the go-to union for workers needing protection, support and advice

Ensure we continue to identify and target new workers across all sectors

Progress special organising initiatives for specific groups such as student nurses, and in priority growth areas such as social care

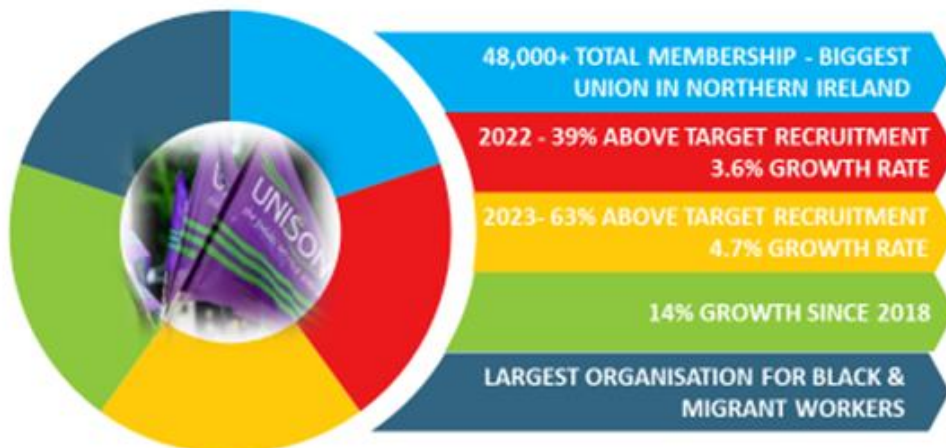
Prioritise UNISON College NI as a key recruitment tool through innovative hybrid (in-person/online) delivery, member engagement and support

Progress effective retention strategies

Ensure that best practice recruitment initiatives are shared across branches

Recognise that effective union building activity at branch level is directly linked member engagement, participation and effective branch governance and administration

Achievements





UNISON NI is playing a lead role in the new union-wide Organising to Win Strategy that was agreed at NDC 2023. The strategy sets out ten key goals to consolidate and sustain membership growth and to urgently begin to expand the workplace activist base.

Head of Organising Thomas Mahaffy is a member of the strategy management team and project board and also leads the priority devolved social care campaign. Regional Officer (Education) Caitlin Ni Chathail is also on the project board and the 'tools and training' workstream. Other workstreams focus on participation and activism; workplace communications; planning & priorities; union structures; organising systems and staffing. Our regional progress on the devolved social care campaign is detailed later in this report with significant resources allocated to it through the Branch Support and Organising Fund.

RMS, central processing and member retention: Our RMS team continue to play a vital role in our recruitment and organising plan. In addition to 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, the team also plays a central role in our regional member retention strategy.

As part of our strategy, the RMS team has already had significant success in agreeing a mechanism (with the BSO in health, the Education Authority, and other employers) for transferring *new* online joiners from direct debit to DOCAS. The team is also playing a central role in our initiative to transfer *existing* direct debit payers in these employers to DOCAS.

The first phase of work on membership, to ensure proper allocation of members to branches and service groups, has been completed. Where further discussions are necessary (for example, to clarify organising and negotiating history, or the employer's commissioning or funding arrangements) meetings will be organised with the relevant branches.



Section 2 and Section 3 of this report outline the many bargaining issues and campaigns that have encouraged more workers to join UNISON and that have also expanded our role on community activism.

Some activities and campaigns that have secured membership increase in 2023 include:

- our pay campaigns across employers large and small;
- challenging funding cuts, budget cuts and proposed service closures;
- public policy campaigns to advance the position of our members, their families and communities, including our Free School Meals for All campaign;
- challenging the roll-back on workers' rights, attempts to bypass direct engagement with us, and failure to produce equality and human rights impact assessments;
- negotiating on health & safety issues, particularly post-pandemic;
- challenging the UK's punitive budget for NI and its impact across all services;
- bargaining for recognition agreements - particularly through our social care campaign;
- our continuing equality and human rights campaigns.

■ Our recruitment achievements in 2022

Recruitment: Table 1 shows that 2022 was another very successful year for UNISON NI, with 6,958 new members joining us. This was a significant 51% increase on the number recruited during 2021 (4610 new members).

Growth: 22 branches ended the year in growth, with only minimal retraction in 5 other branches, primarily as a result of post-pandemic job relocations and service reorganisation. With 3.8% growth of 1621 members, we ended 2022 with a total full membership 46,117. Table 1 and Figs 1-5 show that over the past 5yrs:

- we have grown as a region by 14% - up from 40,468 full members in 2018;
- our 5 education branches have grown very significantly including a +30% membership increase in Derry Education and +37% increase in Down Education;
- our 18 health branches also remain in sustained growth, with the highest membership increases in NIBTS (+35%), NI Ambulance (+30%) and UCHT (+27%); and
- despite major funding problems, community and voluntary sector membership has grown by 13%.



Table 1– UNISON NI recruitment and growth by branch, 1 Jan 2022 to 31 Dec 2022

Branch	2022 Recruitment					Growth Trends		2021 Total joiners
	Target	Total	(Jan to Sept)	(Oct to Dec)	% target met	2022 (No joiners minus leavers)	2018- 2022 (%)	
Belfast City Hospital	313	199	135	64	65%	+35	▲ 7%	104
Belfast Education	150	407	265	142	279%	+126	▲ 26%	220
Causeway	170	169	119	50	99%	+5	▲ 3%	142
Comm & Voluntary	200	329	247	82	167%	+21	▲ 13%	306
Craigavon Health	140	345	185	160	241%	+120	▲ 14%	243
Derry Education	150	357	245	112	238%	+183	▲ 30%	152
Down Education	150	242	153	89	160%	+154	▲ 37%	141
Down Lisburn	300	346	240	106	113%	-11	▲ 15%	299
Foyle	300	351	207	144	111%	-43	▲ 17%	281
Greenpark	110	113	65	48	105%	+47	▲ 14%	84
Health Agencies	50	71	41	30	142%	+30	▲ 3%	22
Mater Hospital	100	102	63	39	106%	+51	▼ 11%	50
N&W Belfast Health	162	303	221	82	189%	+83	▲ 15%	243
NEELB	150	353	195	158	235%	+110	▲ 19%	127
Newry & Mourne	200	230	147	83	116%	+51	▲ 4%	127
NI Ambulance	85	109	58	51	126%	-17	▲ 30%	78
NI Blood Transfusion	12	14	12	2	125%	+12	▲ 35%	6
Northern Health	600	675	488	187	114%	+106	▲ 2%	417
Omagh & Fermanagh	240	219	136	83	88%	-12	▲ 7%	151
Orchard	160	341	243	98	221%	+97	▲ 13%	274
Rathgael	15	2	0	2	13%	0	▲ 17%	3
RVH & Muckamore	463	493	298	195	106%	+156	▲ 11%	351
South & East Belfast	200	313	221	92	158%	+31	▲ 7%	243
Southern Education	100	146	108	38	145%	+88	▲ 15%	50
Sperrin Devenish	80	152	97	55	189%	+86	▲ 26%	70
UCHT	300	549	327	222	182%	+122	▲ 27%	400
UU Coleraine Magee	40	13	12	1	40%	+7	▼ 18%	3
UU Jordanstown	50	15	8	7	30%	-17	▼ 24%	23
Total	5000	6958	(4536)	(2422)	139%	+1621	+14%	4610

Branch growth trends, 2018-2022

Fig 1: 0-500 members

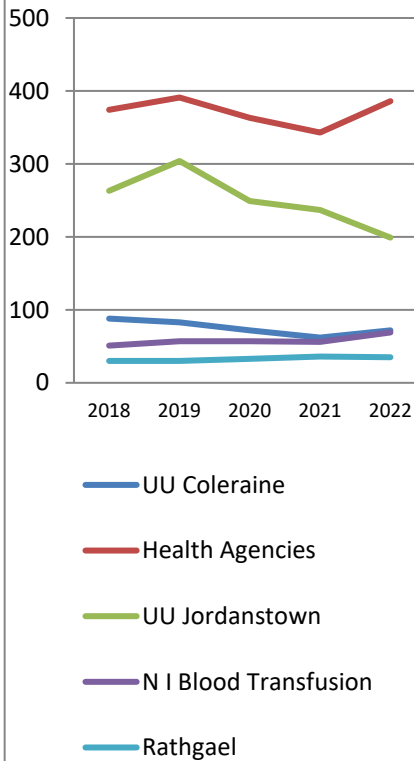


Fig 2: 501-1500 members

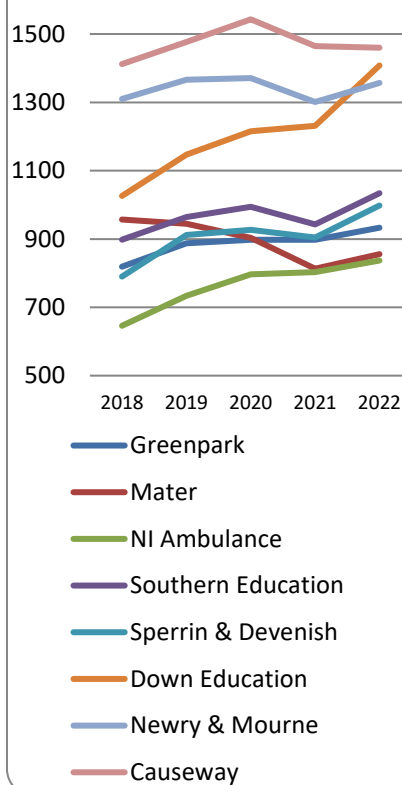


Fig 3: 1501-2000 members

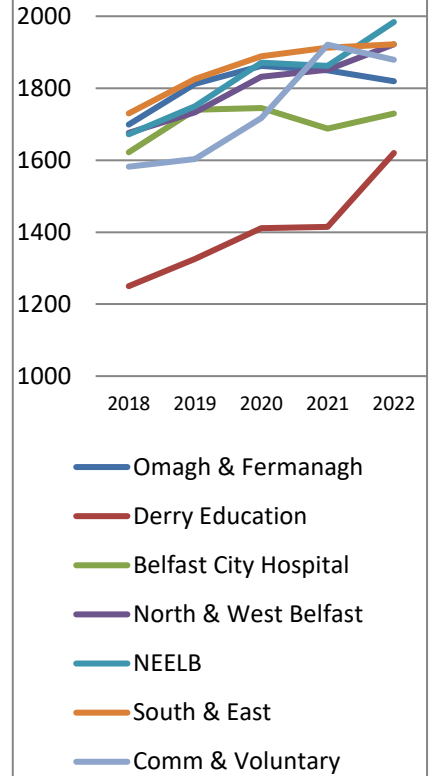


Fig 5: 2001 - 2500 members

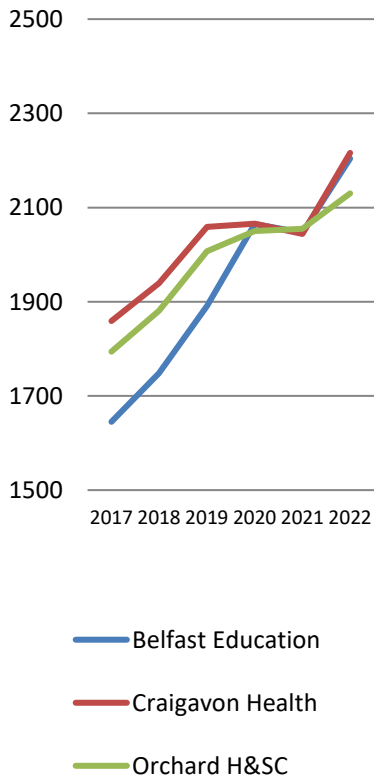
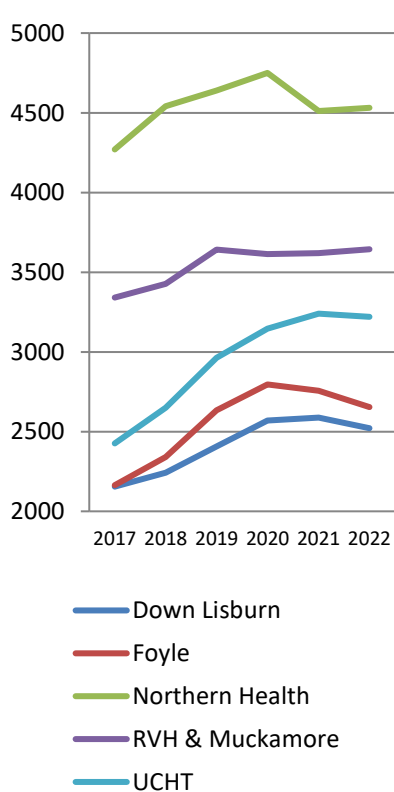


Fig 6: 2500+ members



The charts on this page show growth trends across branches from 31 December 2018 to 31 December 2022.

Patterns of growth or retraction are also identified in Table 1, Column 8.



■ Our recruitment achievements in 2023 to date

Our recruitment success has continued into 2023, with above target progress on new joiners, growth and total full membership recorded to 15th September. Table 2 includes:

- current branch recruitment targets;
- recruitment activity from 1st January 2023 to 15th September 2023, including the proportion joining us online; and
- growth in the year to date.

Full membership: As at 15th September 2023, our total full membership is 48,305 – 8.7% higher than this time last year. As a result, we continue to consolidate our position as the largest union in NI.

Recruitment: Table 2 shows that between 1st Jan and 15th Sept 2023:

- 5765 new members have been recruited across branches to date. This is 63% above our expected target to this time of the year and 43% more than the 4029 members we recruited during the same period in 2022;
- 14 branches have already met their end year target with a further 5 branches at +75% of target, 7 branches between 50% and 74%, and 2 branches less than 50%;
- the 3 branches that have recruited the highest number of new members to date this year are Northern Health (+671 new joiners); UCHT (+454); and Belfast Education (+385). Belfast Education are at 257% of their target for the year to date.



Growth: 25 branches are currently in growth with a total of 2138 more joiners than leavers in the year to date. This equates to a current growth rate of 4.4%.



Online joiners: 74% of our new recruits joined us online. This is an increase from the 71% who joined us online in 2022 and remains well above the 43% who joined us online in 2019, prior to the pandemic.

Table 2 shows that the highest proportion of online joiners continue to come primarily from branches with a membership spread over a wide geographic area such as the C&V sector (95% online joiners), NI Ambulance (90%) or those with a wide range of community services such as Orchard (89%). Health agencies had the highest proportion of online joiners (97%).

Our University branches (UU Jordanstown - 13% and UU Coleraine Magee - 20%) and our single site health branches such as the Mater Hospital (60%) have the lowest proportions. In the education sector, NE Education had the highest proportion of online joiners (87%) with the lowest proportions from Derry Education (63%) and Belfast Education (63%).

The level of stewards cover in an employer has a direct relationship to levels of online joining with our new communications strategies supporting direct recruitment in these often harder to reach areas.

As part of our member retention strategy, we continue to get new employers to sign-up to our project which offers new joiners the option when joining online of paying by either Direct Debit or DOCAS.

Our agreements with BSO in health and social care, and with the Education Authority, covers 57% and 16% of our membership respectively. Further details on our retention strategy in relation to DOCAS is detailed in a subsequent section.

figures over a 5-year period, as well as average joiners and current density levels. This will ensure that new targets will properly reflect leavers rates and target growth, but will also take into account specific branch circumstances.

Branch targets: New branch targets were discussed at 2019 Regional Council, but implementation was put on hold due to the pandemic. The Branch Development Group will be proposing new branch targets for 2024 for discussion and agreement at branch committees. These new targets will be calculated using a formula that primarily takes into account average branch leavers



Table 2 – UNISON NI recruitment and growth by branch, 1 Jan to 15 Sept 2023

Branch	Current Target	Total	% online joiners	No. to reach target	% of target met to date	2023 to date (No. joiners minus leavers)
Belfast City Hospital	313	183	61%	130	58%	+113
Belfast Education	150	385	63%	Target met	257%	+121
Causeway	170	116	66%	54	68%	+22
Community & Voluntary	200	242	95%	Target met	121%	-37
Craigavon Health	140	306	66%	Target met	180%	+117
Derry Education	150	257	63%	Target met	171%	+109
Down Education	150	253	65%	Target met	169%	+44
Down Lisburn	300	315	78%	Target met	105%	+147
Foyle	300	280	80%	20	93%	+100
Greenpark	110	120	65%	Target met	109%	+91
Health Agencies	50	35	97%	15	70%	+13
Mater Hospital Trust	100	65	60%	35	65%	+32
N&W Belfast Health	162	264	86%	Target met	163%	+106
NEELB	150	254	87%	Target met	169%	+62
Newry & Mourne	200	199	80%	1	100%	+81
NI Ambulance	85	59	90%	26	69%	+18
NI Blood Transfusion	12	11	82%	1	92%	+6
Northern Health	600	671	63%	Target met	112%	+352
Omagh & Fermanagh	240	169	77%	71	70%	+74
Orchard	160	248	89%	Target met	155%	+30
Rathgael	15	3	100%	12	20%	+2
RVH & Muckamore	463	392	79%	71	85%	+216
South & East Belfast	200	240	83%	Target met	120%	+89
Southern Education	100	85	65%	15	85%	-78
Sperrin Devenish	80	123	73%	Target met	154%	+31
UCHT	300	454	82%	Target met	151%	+278
UU Coleraine Magee	40	5	20%	35	13%	-8
UU Jordanstown	50	31	13%	19	62%	+7
Total	5000	5765	74%	Target met	115%	2138

Recruitment achievements across key sectors, employers and membership groups

Table 3 details recruitment across our 5 key sectors of membership, and the main employers they work in. It also shows how many women and young members we have recruited this year.



In 2023 to date, we have recruited 2900 new members in the **health & social services sector** (excluding the private sector). This is 31% higher than the same period last year. As a proportion of total recruitment, 49% of our new joiners in 2023 are from this sector, the same % as last year. Recruitment primarily comes from the 5 large Health & Social Care Trusts with Belfast Trust the highest recruiting employer with 837 new joiners.

In 2023 to date, we have recruited 1248 new members in the **education sector**. This is 30% higher than during the same period last year. As a proportion of total recruitment, 21% of our new joiners in 2022 are from this sector, the same % as last year. Recruitment primarily comes from the controlled sector, with 1125 new members (90%) employed by the Education Authority.

In 2023 to date, we have recruited 231 new members in the **community & voluntary sector**. This is similar to the 247 workers we recruited during the same period last year. As a proportion of total recruitment, 4% of our new joiners in 2023 are from this sector, down from 6% last year. The highest number of new joiners this year (16) are employed by Positive Futures. As in other sectors, we continue to deal with the impact of service changes post-pandemic, in addition to the additional pressure of ongoing funding cuts, the impact of vacancies resulting from pay issues, and EU exit.

Our membership in the **private sector** includes private homecare, contractors and private nursing/residential care homes. Recruitment has benefited from the allocation of significant BSOF resources with 1530 new joiners during 2023 to date. This is 41% more than during the same period last year. As a proportion of total recruitment, 26% of our new joiners in 2024 are from this sector. This is higher than the 24% recruited during 2022. Recruitment in the sector has primarily come from BSOF target employers including Beaumont Care Homes Ltd (135 new members), Healthcare Ireland Group (101) and Connected Health Domiciliary Care (70).

The proportion of **young people** joining us remains high, with 1786 recruited in 2023 to date. This equates to 31% of our total recruitment to date. Comparison with previous years is problematic as the age limit has increased to 30 years old following a rule amendment at NDC. Our challenge remains to grow the next generation of union leaders.



During 2023, 75% of all new joiners are **women** (4345 members). Our bargainers are challenging the absence of proper workforce planning in health and education. Our recruitment figures indicate potential change and require study to understand how the workforce is changing.

Table 3 - UNISON NI recruitment by sector, employer and equality group, 1 Jan to 18 Sept 2023

Membership sector & highest recruiting employers	Recruitment			
	Jan-Sept 2023	Jan-Sept 2022	Total 2022	Total 2021
Health and social services (exc. private sector)	2900 (49%)	2211 (49%)	3585 (52%)	2371 (51%)
• Belfast HSC Trust	837	550	967	691
• South Eastern HSC Trust	542	327	598	439
• Southern HSC Trust	424	312	452	408
• Northern HSC Trust	394	310	562	251
• Western HSC Trust	280	170	335	244
• NIAS	46	50	96	68
Higher education	36 (<1%)	17 (<1%)	26 (<1%)	26 (<1%)
Education & other NJC	1248 (21%)	960 (21%)	1481 (21%)	671 (15%)
• Education Authority – Western	352	327	481	186
• Education Authority – Belfast	301	195	304	112
• Education Authority – North Eastern	207	150	228	111
• Education Authority – South Eastern	193	127	192	99
• Education Authority – Southern	72	72	104	39
Community & Voluntary	231 (4%)	247 (6%)	339 (5%)	302 (7%)
• Positive Futures	16	14	22	17
• Inspire Wellbeing	14	18	24	32
• Apex Housing Association	13	37	42	25
Private sector (inc. homecare, contractors,	1530 (26%)	1087(24%)	1527 (22%)	1240 (27%)
• Beaumont Care Homes Ltd	135	46	64	-
• Healthcare Ireland Group	101	79	98	31
• Connected Health Domiciliary Care	70	38	44	25
(Young members – now 30yrs old or younger)	1786 (31%)	958 (21%)	1646 (24%)	1081 (23%)
(Women)	4345 (75%)	3451(76%)	5316 (76%)	3677 (80%)
Total	5945	4536	6953	4610

Recruitment achievements across key occupational groups and job roles

Key trends: Table 4 shows that during 2023:

- we have increased the number of new joiners across the majority of occupations and job roles when compared to the same period in 2022;
- the highest proportion of our new joiners (35%) work in administrative / professional & technical roles, followed by social services/ social care staff (26%); nursing – all sectors (26%) and support services – all sectors (14%);
- the highest proportion of our new joiners work as classroom and nursery assistants (16% - 937 new joiners), followed by nurses (13%), care assistants (12%), and admin & clerical staff (9%);
- as a proportion of total recruitment, care assistants recorded the highest increase from 9% last year to 12% this year.



The highest proportion of our new joiners (35%) work in **administrative / professional & technical** roles (2056 new members). This is 37% higher than the number recruited in the same period last year (1497 new joiners). The proportion recruited from this occupational group has increased markedly since 2021 (31%).

Growth in this sector was driven by a very significant increase in the recruitment of *classroom and nursery assistants*. 937 have been recruited to date this year, up 41% from the 664 recruited during the same period last year and 16% of our total recruitment. This reflects the significant increase in recruitment across our education branches during the year.

1555 new members (26% of all new joiners) work in *social service/social care* roles – a 48% increase in the number recruited to this date last year. This includes 418 *support workers* (7% of all new joiners); 684 *care assistants* (12%); and 366 *homecare workers* (6%).

1533 new members work in *nursing* roles across all sectors - a 12% increase in the number recruited to this date last year (1367). As a proportion of total recruitment, 26% of new joiners are employed in nursing roles, compared with 30% last year.

The 2023 recruitment figure includes 787 *nurses* (13% of all new joiners) and 425 *health/nursing assistants* (7% of all new joiners).



801 new members (14% of all new joiners) work in *support services* across all sectors. This includes 418 *cleaners/domestics* (7% of all new joiners), and 231 *catering workers* - 4% of all new joiners. The proportion of new joiners recruited from support services roles (14%) has remained constant over the past three years.

Table 4 - UNISON NI total recruitment by key occupational group and job roles, 1 Jan to 18 Sept 2023

Occupational group and job roles	Recruitment			
	Jan-Sept 2023	Jan-Sept 2022	Total 2022	Total 2021
Admin/P&T – all sectors	2056 (35%)	1497 (33%)	2405 (35%)	1423 (31%)
• Classroom & nursery assistants	937 (16%)	664 (15%)	1073 (15%)	468 (10%)
• Admin & clerical	561 (9%)	435 (10%)	750 (11%)	460 (10%)
Social services/social care – all sectors	1555 (26%)	1047 (23%)	1562 (22%)	1289 (28%)
• Support workers	418 (7%)	319 (7%)	492 (7%)	429 (9%)
• Care assistants	684 (12%)	399 (9%)	566 (8%)	445 (10%)
• Homecare workers	366 (6%)	272 (6%)	401 (6%)	354 (8%)
Nursing – all sectors	1533 (26%)	1367 (30%)	2023 (29%)	1237 (27%)
• Nurses	787 (13%)	586 (13%)	1002 (14%)	680 (15%)
• Health/Nursing assistants	425 (7%)	346 (8%)	540 (8%)	366 (8%)
Support services – all sectors	801 (14%)	625 (14%)	968 (14%)	661 (14%)
• Cleaners/Domestics	418 (7%)	268 (6%)	380 (5%)	263 (6%)
• Catering workers	231 (4%)	222 (5%)	324 (5%)	145 (3%)
Total	5945	4536	6958	4610

The success of our special recruitment and organising initiatives

Devolved social care project: UNISON NI are the largest union organising in private sector homecare and care homes and we have taken a lead role in the new devolved social care project that has been prioritised as part of the new union-wide Organising to Win Project.

With an estimated 20,000+ staff working in hundreds of (mainly private sector) nursing and residential homes, the potential for further recruitment in this sector is huge and

ringfenced resources have been allocated to this project including the appointment of a temporary Strategic Regional Organiser and two Local Organisers employed under the Branch Support & Organising Fund (BSOF).

The challenges of organising in the sector include high staff turnover, a dispersed and fragmented membership and hundreds of often hostile employers, but we are committed to organising this too often exploited workforce.

The key objectives of the social care project are to recruit more members; elect more stewards; organise and mobilise the workforce; and secure new bargaining arrangements and recognition within private sector homecare employers and private nursing and residential care homes.



As such, this new campaign aligns closely with our existing social care strategy which has the additional objectives of halting further privatisation from the NHS to the private sector; and, ultimately, returning privatised services back in house. It is also essential to ensure that the membership are properly serviced and our 10 health and social care branches that form the Project Steering Group will be considering what changes to current branch structures and business will best facilitate this moving forward.

Table 5 shows that to date:

- our combined Trust and private sector homecare membership stands at 4039 – an 18% increase over the year.
- 224 private sector homecare workers have been recruited to date this year – an 81% increase on last year. We now have a total of 1755 members in the sector across 44 companies – a 31% increase in membership during 2023 to date. This sector represents 3% of our total membership.
- our largest group remains Trust homecare. 141 public sector homecare workers have been recruited this year to date and we currently have a total of 2284 across 5 HSC Trusts.
- 700 members have been recruited in private nursing homes and residential settings in the year to date – a 54% increase on last year. We now have a total of 3503 members in the sector, across 185 companies. This sector represents 7% of our total membership.

Other bargaining outcomes in specific employers have included hundreds of workers receiving pay uplifts; successful challenges to non-payment for mandatory training; and negotiated payments for travel time.

The private nursing home sector continues to have a higher proportion of migrant workers than the general workforce and we have intervened with the Department of Health to ensure that all care home operators were reissued with the code of practice for international recruitment. Further work is ongoing to address exploitative practices.

Recruiting and organising both EU nationals and other migrant workers remains a UNISON priority as they continue to face major employment issues associated with their employment status, immigration policies, racism and discrimination.



Non-Education Authority schools: A BSOF Local Organiser is supporting recruitment and organising in the non EA workforce, including in integrated and voluntary grammar schools. This new initiative is focused on recruiting new members and activists; and delivering recognition, facilities and collective bargaining agreements to improve pay and terms and conditions.

Table 5 shows that 119 members have been recruited in non-EA schools to date this year, compared with 71 in the same period last year. We now have 878 members in 76 non-EA schools – a 12% increase in members over the year.

Very successful in-person **student nurse recruitment** events took place in Queens and Magee during 2023. We also engaged with potential new student members through:

- hosting a series of online sessions about the benefits of joining UNISON;

- offering CPD courses on hundreds of different topics through the UNISON College NI, including free access to all of our members to nursing times with 30 clinical e-learning modules and 100s of journal articles;
- sending out an email (via HQ and UCAS) to social work students.



In total we have recruited 293 new student nurses during 2023 to date. Student nurse recruitment is led by Area Organiser Susan Neill, and we continue to participate in a union-wide project to identify the most positive, attractive route to engage, recruit and retain student healthcare members in the face of competition from other unions. In total we have 792 student nurse members – an 18% increase over the year.

Other activity and success: As part of the Regional Committee Strategy we target a wide variety of other sectors and occupational groups with bespoke communications and recruitment materials; targeted telephone contact; and the organisation of online member meetings to identify key issues and potential new stewards.

Some of this additional activity is outlined below.

- We continue to identify new entry points, and opportunities for engagement and recruitment of newly employed staff and former members.
- We support UNISON-wide recruitment initiatives.
- We promote the 'Be on the safe side' health & safety initiative, maximising the information and support provided to members across all sectors.
- Self-organised group activity in the organising programme continues. They 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.
- The UNISON College continues to be a highly effective tool for engaging with members and non-members through online activist training, member learning and other initiatives.



Table 5 - UNISON NI special recruitment initiatives, 1 Jan to 15 Sept 2023

Recruitment initiatives	Recruitment				Full members		No. of employers	
	Jan-Sep 2023	Jan-Sep 2022	Total 2022	Total 2021	To Sept 2023	Total 2022	Total 2023	To Sep 2022
Private homecare	224	124	162	184	1755	1341	44	44
HSC Trust Homecare	141	148	238	170	2284	2071	5	5
PNHs & residential care	700	456	602	479	3503	3418	185	201
Student nurses	293	428	463	190	792	669	8	8
Non EA Schools	119	71	131	-	878	785	76	-

DOCAS and membership retention: The largest group of leavers in UNISON NI (51%) continue to be Direct Debit payers.



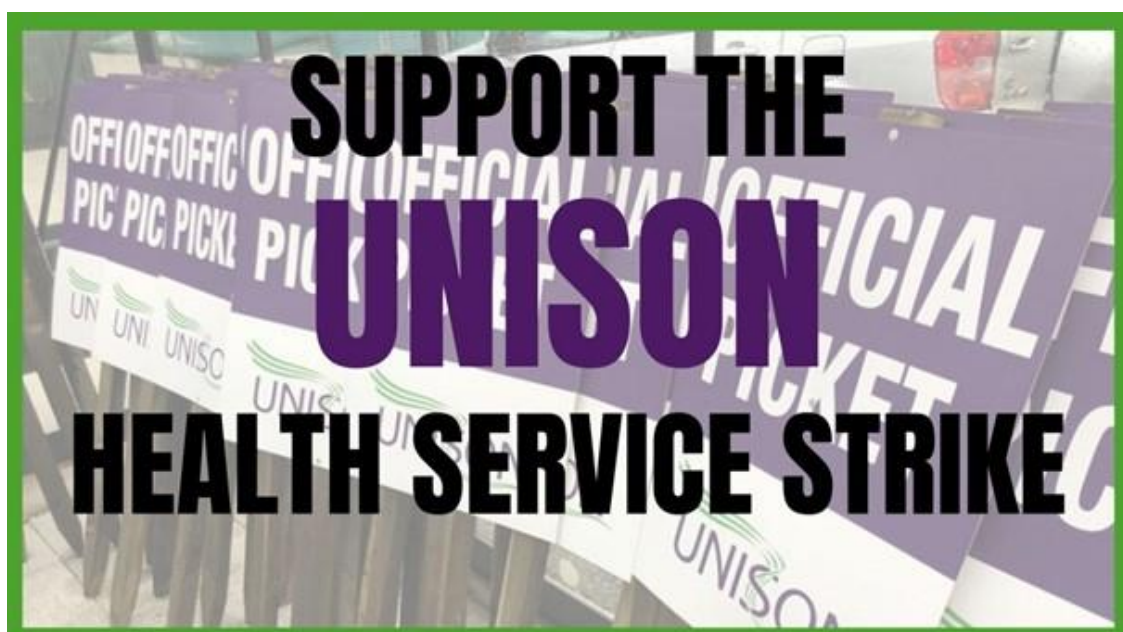
Potential reasons for this include the increase in online joining, particularly during the pandemic; our very successful recruitment in private social care where DOCAS is not yet available; and our recruitment of student nurses whose membership transfers to Direct Debit through auto-enrolment when they enter employment.

However, it does not fully explain why large health branches and large education branches

with direct DOCAS for the majority of workers, now have high Direct Debit percentages.

As detailed in the previous section we now have agreements with the Health Trusts and Education sectors to convert online joiners to DOCAS. The current challenge is getting the existing membership to convert and that is the core of a new Regional Committee project. Outside the public service, the challenge is to secure more DOCAS agreements with smaller employers or in many cases secure union recognition first.

Deduction of contributions at source is the method by which trade unions are able to collect subscriptions at source from the employer.



Building branch and workplace organisation

This section outlines progress on building branch and workplace organisation during 2023 in four key areas:



The most important indicators of branch health will continue to include levels of member participation; a growing steward base; the filling of branch committee posts; the

full application of proportionality and fair representation; and robust branch finances.

The majority of branches function effectively, with the significant increase in recruitment during 2023 reflecting a high level of activity and member engagement including hundreds of face-to-face meetings with members and potential members, and a whole range of recruitment activities across workplaces during pay ballots and ongoing industrial action. However, it is clear that challenges remain and these are considered in the following sections.



■ Branch development

Democratic participation project: Heightened activity on industrial action has increased the democratic participation of members in most areas. We continue to monitor:

- our members' attitudes to the support and services they receive;
- branch development & organisation;
- member participation and the democratic structure and function of our branches;
- our stewards base; member representation & branch bargaining;
- participation in the UNISON College NI;
- branch governance, admin and finance;
- our regional democratic structures and internal systems.

Joint branch assessments, activity-based budgets and their implementation:

In NI the RMS and organising teams continue to work in partnership with branches to ensure that joint branch assessments (supported by the online Organising Framework) is an effective decision-making forum for building branch and workplace organisation and that it is being translated into branch plans and reorganised branch committee agendas. A union-wide review is looking at the effectiveness of the current online Framework to ensure it provides meaningful data and insight.

The joint branch assessment process

The picture

Using our regional databases to create up to date pictures of the members, structures and democratic participation in each branch

The finance

Ensuring that every committee member knows how branch finance operates – including the general branch management of funds and budgeting

The plan

Using that information to resource a branch plan that focuses on recruitment and organising, core bargaining issues, relevant campaigns, and the resources allocated to deliver goals.

■ Branch development – Measuring organising success



Table 6 highlights some of the most useful branch development indicators that are used by Regional Committee to measure the democratic health of branches and the key areas of support that may be needed. It shows that:

- the vast majority of branches have **paid release** resources available;
- most branches completed their yearly **joint branch assessment** with varying degrees of success and submitted the online organising framework on time;
- all were **mapped online** to facilitate informed decision-making;
- branch participation in **online communications activity** remains high;
- 22 branches achieved **membership growth during 2022** with 5 in limited retraction;
- whilst an improvement on 2022, the number of **new stewards** (83) remains below target and this becomes an organising priority for the final quarter. The difficulty in encouraging new reps is a challenge across the union and is priority for the new Organising to Win strategy;
- some core posts, in particular on equality, environment, and solidarity require special action from most branches;
- all branches should have their branch committee **minutes** on file as a legal and financial record. This is essential to ensure that decisions are democratically taken by quorate committees and recorded, including decisions relating to budgets, income and expenditure;
- compliance with UNISON financial rules is indicated only by **financial returns**. However, further compliance measures include the tabling of OLBA reports at monthly meetings, monitoring of budgets, auditing, AGM reporting, and regional support on compliance;
- on **expenses**, Regional Council operates on the principle that volunteers should not be out of pocket for union activity, but nor is profit to be made from union funds.

Table 6 - Branch development indicators, 2022/23

Branch	Paid release	JBA	Active online	Mapped	2022 growth	New stewards elected from 1 Oct 2022		Stewards ERA trained from Oct 2022		Branch minutes on File?	Submit Finance return on time
						F	M	F	M		
Belfast City Hospital	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+35	3	5	2	3	Yes	Yes
Belfast Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+126	1	0	3	1	Yes	Yes
Causeway	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+5	6	0	4	6	Yes	Yes
Community & Vol	Yes	No	Yes	Online	+21	4	1	0	4	Yes	Yes
Craigavon Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+120	0	2	1	0	Yes	Yes
Derry Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+183	2	0	3	2	Yes	Yes
Down Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+154	4	1	3	4	Yes	Yes
Down & Lisburn	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	-11	6	0	5	6	Yes	Yes
Foyle Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	-43	1	0	1	1	Yes	Yes
Greenpark Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+47	2	1	1	2	Yes	Yes
Health Agencies	A&W	Yes	Yes	Online	+30	0	1	1	0	Yes	Yes
Mater Hospital	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+51	2	1	0	2	Yes	Yes
N & W Belfast	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+83	0	0	1	0	Yes	Yes
NE Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+110	1	2	1	1	Yes	Yes
Newry & Mourne	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+51	4	1	1	4	Yes	Yes
NI Ambulance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	-17	0	5	0	0	Yes	Yes
NI Blood Transfusion	A&W	Yes	Yes	Online	+12	1	0	0	1	Yes	Yes
Northern Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+106	5	0	5	5	Yes	Yes
Omagh & Fermanagh	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	-12	4	1	1	4	Yes	Yes
Orchard H&SC	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+97	1	0	0	1	Yes	Yes
Rathgael	A&W	Yes	Yes	Online	0	0	0	0	0	Yes	Yes
RVH & Muckamore	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+156	0	1	0	0	Yes	Yes
S & E Belfast	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+31	2	0	1	2	Yes	Yes
Southern Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+88	2	0	1	2	Yes	Yes
Sperrin & Devenish	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+86	1	0	0	1	Yes	Yes
UCHT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+122	2	4	2	2	Yes	Yes
UU Coleraine	A&W	Yes	Yes	Online	+7	1	0	1	1	No	Yes
UU Jordanstown	A&W	Yes	Yes	Online	-17	1	1	0	1	No	Yes



Measuring branch participation: Table 7, shows that branch participation in those areas required by Rule remains high. The majority of branch committees have returned to in-person or hybrid meetings. Industrial action in health and education saw a major return to member workplace meetings. Participation in marches, rallies and demonstrations remains high, including International Women's Day, May Day and the Durham Miners' Gala.



Table 7 - Branch participation, 2022/23

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

■ Membership participation and building the stewards base

Annual General Meetings: Most branch AGMs were a mix of in-person and hybrid. With the expansion of the organising team, Regional Committee will provide further support on the expansion of the steward base in preparation for the 2024 AGMs. Proportionality and fair representation will be maximised.

Direct member engagement: As previously reported, direct member engagement has continued at a high level: Branches also continue to take advantage of the bulk emailing system and the text messaging services available from the Regional Centre.



Examples of direct member engagement from Galway House during 2022/23 included:

- thousands of phone calls with new joiners and UNISON members in specific sectors;
- hundreds of member representations and workplace meetings - physical and online;
- distribution of tens of thousands of newsletters and surveys on health & safety and other key workplace issues;
- more than half of the members base were contacted by email and post to participate in pay ballot and other consultations;
- hundreds of meetings with branch committees, JNFs, employers, lay negotiating teams and self-organised groups, involving nearly 1000 activists;
- thousands of 'one to one' staff conversations with individual activists;
- 15,281 followers on our Facebook site;

- 464 activist places and 3724 student places accessed in the UNISON College NI;
- 4,080 followers on X/twitter and 730 followers on Instagram;
- thousands of people accessing UNISON NI webinars, video content & films on health & safety & other campaigns.



Steward base: Building a bigger, stronger and more representative activist base is central to the new union-wide Organising to Win strategy as well as our own Branch Support Organising Fund and other regional projects. It also remains core work for existing branch officials and the staff organising team.

While the programme to increase the stewards base is producing positive results, retirement and changes in work continue to take a toll on other core branch activist posts. Regional Committee has identified the need for a specific push on the new core posts of women's officer and environmental officer.



Table 8: Proportionality by activist post- 2021

Activist Position	Total 2023	Women 2023	Men 2023	Total 2022	Women 2022	Men 2022	Total 2021	Women 2021	Men 2021
Branch Secretaries	41	71%	29%	45	64%	36%	46	61%	39%
Branch Chairs	43	60%	40%	45	67%	33%	39	72%	28%
Branch Treasurers	52	73%	27%	52	71%	29%	51	67%	33%
Other Branch Posts	126	61%	37%	147	63%	37%	143	52%	48%
Workplace Stewards	483	63%	36%	454	63%	37%	517	62%	38%
Contacts	176	89%	11%	183	87%	13%	194	87%	13%
Total	921	68%	31%	926	69%	31%	990	66%	34%

■ Branch funding

Branch Support & Organising Fund: The UNISON NI Branch Support and Organising Fund (BSOF) is overseen by a lay steering group and the Regional Secretary.



Set at 2% of subscription income, plus the surplus of the original regional Pool, two funding streams are in place to meet the demands of different branch and regional organising projects.

BSOF Fund – In 2022, the Committee agreed that the annual BSOF funding should be ring-fenced to support the recruitment of 3 new permanent NEC employed Local Organisers to work directly on BSOF projects alongside the respective branch teams and the organising team. These new BSOF Local Organisers were duly appointed in March and May 2023 to work on projects in private social care and our membership in non-EA education, particularly integrated schools and voluntary grammar schools. Both projects are producing significant results as outlined in the previous section.

Activity Fund – 17 branches provided funding, supported by the Activity Fund, to enable the recruitment of 6 new fixed term Local Organisers. The recruitment process is currently underway.



Income: Total income returned to Head Office increased to £5,230,076.63. This represents a 2% increase on the previous year (£5,147,265.11). Total income returned to branches for 2022 was £1,194,536.99.





Participation and structures

Proportionality and fair representation and operation of UNISON NI structures

The number of our women members has reached 39,028 - 80% of our total membership.

The Constitution of **Regional Council** provides for proportionality. Branches and other lay structures fully co-operate to ensure that delegates are proportional on the basis of gender. It is the Regional Council / Regional Committee role to ensure that branches and all structures, including conference delegations, comply with both proportionality and fair representation rules. Branch attendance at the 2022 Council was 98%. The proportion of women delegates rose to 75%.

Lay structures are also designed to ensure positive action in the sectors covered by our

self-organised groups. Fair representation is also based on the profile of the membership and includes occupation, sector, geography and community background.

The **Regional Committee** has met 4 times since last Regional Council. The Committee currently has 37 members and its composition stands at 84% women. The NI NEC members are ex-officio. All meetings were quorate. The agenda was dominated by delivery of UNISON's core objectives and priorities across all four main areas of our work. Regional Committee has returned to in-person meetings.

Regional Committee members also devote additional time to organising priorities through our subgroups as set out in Table 9 below.

Table 9 – Regional Committee sub-structures

Branch development group	Education group	Branch Support & Organising Fund Group	Regional implementation group
James Large / Stephanie Greenwood (1) Noreen Robinson / Kevin Hillick (2) Alastair Long Margaret McKee Catherine McKenna Aine Brennan Clair Hardy	James Large / Stephanie Greenwood (1) Noreen Robinson / Kevin Hillick (2) Alastair Long Margaret McKee Catherine McKenna Conor McCarthy (3) Anne Taggart Deborah Yapicioz Representatives from Branch Education Officers, ULRs, lay tutors	James Large / Stephanie Greenwood (1) Noreen Robinson / Kevin Hillick (2) Alastair Long Margaret McKee Catherine McKenna Joint Chairs of service groups and SOGs	James Large / Stephanie Greenwood (1) Noreen Robinson / Kevin Hillick (2) Alastair Long Margaret McKee Catherine McKenna

(1) James Large resigned as Joint Regional Convenor in March 2023 to take up a permanent role on the staff team. Stephanie Greenwood was elected as interim Joint Regional Convenor in the same month; (2) Noreen Robinson resigned as Joint Regional Convenor in May 2023 to take up a permanent role on the staff team. Kevin Hillick was elected as interim Joint Regional Convenor in August 2023; (3) Conor McCarthy resigned from the Group in June 2023 after taking up a temporary secondment to the staff team.

Our joint **Regional Convenors** preside over all formal meetings of our regional lay structures, with UNISON-wide and NEC engagements, and in ICTU delegations to BDC and the Northern Conference.

They also play a key role in a wide range of ICTU structures and participate in events, roundtables and discussions with our partners on equality and human rights. Throughout the year they have led all UNISON delegations with political parties.

Both James Large and Noreen Robinson were elected at 2021 Council but both resigned from their roles in 2023 to take up posts on the staff team. Stephanie Greenwood was elected to replace James on an interim basis in March 2023 and Kevin Hillick was elected to replace Noreen on an interim basis in August 2023. Both will preside over the 2023 Regional Council.

In June 2023, Margaret McKee, Alastair Long and Catherine McKenna were re-elected as the **NEC members for NI**. They make reports to Regional Committee and reflect the views

of Regional Committee / Regional Council back to the NEC. Each also has a lead role in a range of our campaigns including equality and human rights, organising and global solidarity.



The **Regional Implementation Group** comprises the Joint Convenors and the three NEC members for NI, working in partnership with the Regional Secretary and others. 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.



Self-organised and special issue groups

Giving voice to tackling disadvantage and combating discrimination

On equality and human rights, we continue to press for long outstanding reform of the anti-discrimination legislation and the introduction of the Bill of Rights.

In this 25th Anniversary year, we have continued to highlight the deficits, working with our colleagues in the field of equality and human rights. The absence of a legislative Assembly continues to frustrate campaign efforts.

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

Participation: The Women's Committee has 56 members representing 24 branches and has held 4 meetings this year to date. Two new Joint Chairs were elected in February 2023 – Helen Crickard and Anne Taggart. The Committee thanks the outgoing Joint Chairs, Anne McVicker and Deborah Yapicioz, for their leadership and commitment over the past 4 years. Their term was extended due to the pandemic. The Committee has grown in both confidence and numbers due to their guidance, support and dedication.

In 2022/2023, Women's Committee members participated extensively in a wide range of organising and campaigning activity with all NI branches participating in at least one regional event. Our local women's committees also continue to organise events and ongoing campaigns within their own branches, with particular activity taking place during International Women's Day.



International Women's Day: The theme of this year's IWD on 8th March was 'Stand up Fight Back'. UNISON once again had the largest turnout at the Belfast march and rally with various branches and women's committees organising other supportive events. These included:

- Southern Area Women's Committee - Each branch within the Southern Trust collated information, produced a leaflet and organised domestic violence stalls in workplaces, attended the Belfast rally, and made a donation to Women's Aid.
- UCHT branch organised stalls in the Ulster Hospital on IWD and distributed copies of the menopause policy along with treats. The branch also donated £100 to each of 3 women's charities.

Work programme: The Committee's 2023 Work programme included:

- 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;
- 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;
- supporting the campaign for a violence against women and girls strategy;
- campaigning for legislation to outlaw misogyny;
- campaigning for relationships, sexuality education in schools (RSE).

The Committee agreed to organise branch donations in support of the opening of *Catherine House* - a 10-bed home for homeless women in South Belfast. It is named after Catherine Kenny, a vulnerable woman who died in Belfast city centre in 2016. Committee members agreed to collect sanitary products and toilet rolls; tea, coffee, sugar, and perishable food; and underwear and toiletries.

Local schools also provided donations with the Committee paying special thanks to St Aidan's High School, Derrylin; St Mary's primary school, Teemore; St Naile's Primary school, Kinawley; St Mary's, Mullmesker, Arney; Holy Family Senior site, Omagh; and Hazelwood Integrated College, Belfast. The donations were delivered to Galway House and collected by the Welcome Organisation on 21st April.

On 29 October 2022, the Committee joined the '*Women Demand Better*' rally in Belfast City Centre. Deborah Yapicioz was a guest speaker and highlighted underfunding and cuts in health, education, and the community & voluntary sector. These cuts will predominately affect women and children.



World Menopause Day took place on 18 October 2022 and Committee members held events in various workplaces to raise awareness of menopause is a workplace issue.

Menstrual/reproductive health a workplace issue - On 15 November 2022, Area Organiser Danielle McCusker was invited by the FSU trade union to be a guest speaker on 'Why is menstrual/reproductive health a workplace issue'. She also spoke on what trade unions and employers can do in adopting policies to raise awareness and help avoid potentially discriminatory treatment in the workplace.

16 Days of Action (26 Nov – 6 December 2022) – On Wednesday 30 November the Committee held an online 'Violence against women and girls' workshop. The event included a presentation from Aoife Mallon from WRDA on why we need a VAWG strategy, with discussion taking place on the next steps to achieve this.



The *Reclaim the Night rally* took place on 26 November 2022 in Belfast. Committee members once again took to the streets to demand an end to gender based violence. The rally was particularly relevant this year following so many high profile acts of violence against women.

Women's Spaces is a new innovative project developed by WRDA, NIRWIN, WSN, and the Women's Platform to strengthen women's capacity to take their rightful place as leaders in society. In June members of the Committee attended an event on Women, Peace and Security to mark 25 years of the Good Friday Agreement from a women's perspective and to focus on what is still outstanding and needed for the future.

Following an ongoing campaign by UNISON for the introduction of *Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) in schools* in NI, the Committee welcomed the report from the NI Human Rights Commission that states that NI does not meet human rights standards to which government is bound.

The Commission carried out an investigation to assess the extent to which post-primary schools in NI are providing “age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion”, as recommended by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 2018 Report, and incorporated into UK law. The report recommends amending the law to make such education a compulsory component of the curriculum for young people, and monitor its implementation, in line with the CEDAW recommendation.

On 25th September we organised a joint seminar with our Welfare Committee on *gambling awareness* and its increase due to the cost-of-living crisis.

Conferences and committees: 34 NI delegates attended *UNISON Women's Conference* from 16-18 February 2023 in Bournemouth. The conference theme was ‘Together we Rise’ and was chaired by Joint Chair of NI Women's Committee Anne McVicker. Regional delegates Mary Lyttle and Anne Taggart moved the NI motions on ‘the cost of living crisis and the impact on women and families’ and ‘menstrual health’.



All our delegates spoke on various motions and Deborah Yapicioz, Anne McVicker, Catherine McKenna and Helen Crickard all chaired a fringe meeting on sexual harassment, including its definition, the meaning of consent, the importance of RSE in schools and victim blaming.

UNISON are represented on the *ICTU Women's Committee* by Deborah Yapicioz and Danielle McCusker. Its work programme is informed and set by the motions passed at the Women's Conference as well as relevant motions from the NIC ICTU Biennial Conference and all island conference.



This year's *ICTU Women's Seminar* was held in Dundalk in March 2023. The theme was ‘Demanding a fair deal for women workers’ and sessions took place on organising, the gender pay gap, sexual harassment, tackling the far right, and solidarity with women's struggles in Afghanistan and Iran.

The *Trade Union Women's Council of the Isles*, covering all 4 Congresses, took place in Glasgow in October 2022. Our UNISON delegation was Deborah Yapicioz representing the ICTU Women's Committee and Anne Speed representing the ICTU Executive Council.

Congratulations to Anne McVicker, who was recognised with an honorary doctorate for her role in women's community work and tackling gender equality over the last 30 years.

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

■ LGBT+ Group

The LGBT+ Group met 6 times since the last Regional Council. It has 150 registered members representing 27 branches. Our Group continues to be regarded as a trade union leader on LGBT+ campaigns, and members continue to attend numerous events, festivals and protests - representing, campaigning, and promoting UNISON.

Increasing Participation: Member involvement on the Group continues to rise as a result of attendance at many events within workplaces and promoting UNISON to LGBT+ members and potential members. In addition, we are exploring working collaboratively with the young members forum and our other SOG's.

Danielle Roberts was elected to the role of Convenor. Andrew Linton and Catherine Connell-Tierney are the representatives for the national LGBT+ Committee. The group have purchased new T-shirts, pop ups and a new banner, all including the LGBT+ name following the UNISON rule change.



2023 Pride events have taken place in Inishowen, Omagh, Belfast, Causeway, Mid Ulster, Bangor, Foyle and Larne. Causeway Pride was historic as the first ever Pride in this area. UNISON played a pivotal role by hosting an LGBT+ health and wellbeing event. Despite a far-right protest we stood louder and prouder as a community. Hundreds of people joined the Portrush rally celebrating diversity in the hometown of the late LGBT+ activist Mark Ashton.

Trans Awareness campaign: The group continue to take forward the 'Trans Equality is UNISON business' campaign and it has been at the forefront of all the activity contained in this report. This year's UNISON

College NI programme included Trans Ally training for the first time. This training was also delivered to the LGBT+ group and work is ongoing to increase participation in this important training course for UNISON activists and members.

Over the last year the 'Our Journeys' film has been shown to more than 200 UNISON members in Derry, Belfast and Portrush, and in workplaces including the Mater Hospital. Additionally, the film has had over 1,000 views online. The film focuses on the journey of transgender and non-binary people.

The group also helped to organise and attended 'Songs for Solidarity' in Spring 2023, a community event in response to a right wing, anti trans rally taking place elsewhere in Belfast. The event was a real celebration of our Trans siblings, LGBTQ+ families and solidarity between LGBTQ+ organisations, the women's sector and trade unions.

LGBT+ History month: In February the group hosted the Belfast launch of 'Our Journeys' in Galway House which included a panel discussion with more than 50 people attending.

UNISON LGBT+ Conference: Eight members of the Group attended LGBT+ conference in November and were delighted to win the Recruitment and Organising award in recognition of their great work in 2022. Conference also premiered of the group's new film "Our Journeys". The Group has submitted a motion on Assisted Conception Leave for 2023 Conference.

Other Awards: The work of the group has been recognised in a number of ways over the year, including being nominated in the 'Friendly Facilitator' category for the GNI Magazine awards and winning the 'Pride Ally' award at the launch of Belfast Pride. Danielle Roberts, group convenor, was presented a certificate of recognition by the Mayor of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council in recognition of LGBTQIA+ community work.

The work of the LGBT+ Group is supported by Louise O'Hara, Regional Organiser.

■ Disability Group

The Disability Committee has met 3 times since last Regional Council. Branch nominations to the Group have increased and we continue to encourage branches to take up their entitlement. The key elements of our workplan for 2022/23 include the following key activities.

The budget: The Secretary of State's budget is causing avoidable harm to disabled people by removing funding from essential services for disabled people. The Department of Health's decision to cut the core grant provided to 62 organisations, including our close ally Disability Action, will result in the loss of services with severe impacts on disabled people and organisational sustainability in the future. We are working through the Equality Coalition to challenge the decision and pressing the ECNI to take action on the basis of widening inequality and deepening discrimination.

Disability Passports: The Group co-designed the Belfast HSC Trust's Disability Passport which was introduced earlier this year and similar work is ongoing with the other Trusts. Our members in education report that the passports implemented in the Education Authority are working well.



The Group continues to work with the wider UNISON team:

- to ensure that disabled people are central to the **rebuild and redesign of our health service**;
- to campaign on **mental health issues in the workplace**, raising the profile of its impact and the need for employers to have policies to provide support to staff;

- to raise awareness of **Access to Work (NI)** - a Department for Communities scheme that provides advice, support and financial assistance to people with disabilities to take up employment or, if in work, who experience difficulties related to their disability.



The labour market disadvantage that disabled people encounter is demonstrated by a large and enduring disability employment gap, and disability gaps in pay, job satisfaction and work-related well-being. **UNISON's Disability Employment Charter** outlines the action government needs to take to address the disadvantage disabled people encounter in their working lives. Action is also required by UNISON branches and activists to promote the Charter with employers.

Committees, conferences and events:

UNISON is represented on the ICTU Disability Committee by Marjorie Trimble and Amanda Sweetlove; on the UNISON National Disability Committee by Amanda Sweetlove and Amanda Rutherford; and on Regional Committee by Marjorie Trimble. This year Amanda Sweetlove was elected as Vice Chair to UNISON's National Disabled Members Committee. Regional delegates and Branch delegates will be attending the national disabled members conference in Edinburgh from 28th to 30th October.

From the UNISON College section of this report we can see that 13 UNISON members attended mental health awareness training.

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

■ Black and Migrant Workers' Group

The black and migrant workers (B&MW) Group met 12 times this year. It has 14 members (57% women). The Group has moved to monthly online meetings and planned a series of events and in-person meetings throughout the year to celebrate 2023 UNISON Year of Black Workers.

The more regular online meetings, and the very active WhatsApp group, have allowed for more flexibility and a more consistent way of keeping in touch. Information also continues to be shared with the entire black and migrant worker membership via e-bulletins and our group's Facebook page.

The Group was deeply saddened and shocked by the passing of former Head of Organising and Chair of Migrant Centre NI Pamela Dooley earlier this year. Pamela started the Group years ago and many in the Filipino community were helped by her in these early years with the first wave of international recruitment of healthcare staff to NI. Our Group will continue to feel the deepest gratitude for the work and energy she put into organising all migrant workers here.



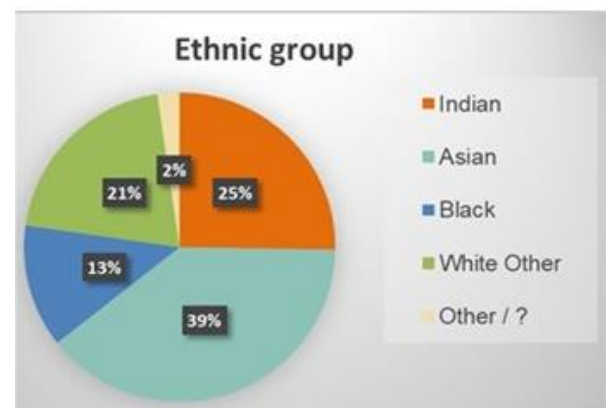
Workplan: Key areas of our workplan include:

- increasing membership and participation in the union at all levels;
- increasing the representation of black and migrant workers, stewards and officers and developing and participating in key campaigns to secure their rights;
- analysing membership trends and their impact on our wider organising, bargaining and policy agendas;
- including refugees and asylum seekers in our programmes, and campaigning for their rights.

Participation and membership trends: We have almost 3500 members in NI who state that they are black and migrant workers. 93% work in health, 54% are nurses and 70% are women. This number is growing alongside the constant recruitment of international personnel in the Trusts and private care sector. As a result, almost all new black and migrant worker members are on sponsorship visas / work permits. Fig. 7 shows that:

- 33% of our black and migrant worker members state that they are Filipino / Chinese / Asian Other;
- 34% state that they are Indian / Pakistani / Bangladeshi;
- 18% state that they are Black African / Black UK / Black other
- 14% state that they are White European / White other

Fig. 7 – UNISON NI black and migrant worker membership by self-reported ethnic group



Work permits: The growing number of black and migrant worker members on sponsorship visas / work permits has created a new set of challenges for our union. Although it is not the first time we have people on work permits, the immigration and political environment have significantly worsened for people who experience difficulties. Migrants on work permits are extremely vulnerable to exploitation as they are tied to their employers both legally and financially. The consequences of this are particularly drastic in the private care sector, particularly when members are so unhappy with their work conditions that they decide to leave before the end of their contract.

On top of the legal complications, members now face huge financial burdens with employers presenting them with bills for thousands of pounds as a result of **repayment clauses**. Migrants and their families are also constantly at risk of being at the wrong end of the 'hostile environment' should they fall short of any of the immigration requirements hanging over them. Following UNISON interventions at Departmental and employer level there has been progress on this issue but it remains a problem for many workers. Group members were also involved in media work over the repayment clauses / sponsorship visa issue.

Committees, conferences and events: 2023 has been a very busy year including attendance at: Black Members Conference in Edinburgh in January; various picket lines and strike action; International day for the elimination of racial discrimination; an anti-racism rally in Dublin; May Day march and rally; ICTU biennial conference in Kilkenny; women's sector conferences; a seminar on the Common Travel Area; global solidarity events; Migrant Centre NI leadership training; Windrush anniversary event in Westminster; International nurses forum meeting in October; ICTU trade union history weekend in Dublin; various demonstrations in support of Palestine; and several cultural events such as the Filipino barrio fiesta.

The group also had a visible presence through information stalls in hospitals, marking **2023 UNISON year of black workers**.

In April 23 we had a **pension seminar** for migrant workers, with a very informative presentation from Peter Urwin from the UNISON pension unit. This came on the back of questions from migrant workers in health branches who wanted to know what happens to your pension when you plan to move back to the Philippines or India after retirement.

The Group and staff team have organised a seminar in Derry in October exploring the **mental health issues faced by black and migrant communities** here. The event also marks the 2023 UNISON year of black members, Black history month and the International day on mental health.



The Group will be focusing on the issue of mental health in black and migrant worker communities, both in terms of the stigma around these issues and lack of access to culturally competent services.

Access to immigration advice through UNISON legal services: We continue to push for access to immigration advice and representation through our legal services. In September, members of the Group attended a symposium organised by the London region on this issue which is now also affecting branches and regions across England. We are hoping to see other regions joining our call for a change to include immigration advice in legal services similarly to what is offered in criminal cases, personal injury cases or through the Professional Services Unit.

Our immigration advice clinic now operates every second Thursday of the month. Face to face monthly clinic can be booked through n.donnelly@unison.co.uk. Members can also access immigration advice over the phone through UNISON Direct – 0800 0 857857 (they then get a call back on a Tuesday from JCWI, a leading UK charity providing immigration advice)

Services to members: Face to face English classes (both OET and IELTS) continue. Many refugee support groups send us regular referrals, especially from asylum seekers with very good English levels hoping to be able to practice here eventually as doctors, physiotherapists, dentists etc.

English classes	Total	Male	Female
Nov 22 / June 23	59	32	27

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

Special issue groups

■ Retired Members' Forum

The Retired Members Forum held 3 meetings during 2023. It has 29 members and its composition currently stands at 73% women.

Recruitment, organising, campaigns, lobbying and events: Throughout the year, individual members participated in regional and branch recruitment and organising initiatives. The Forum has also continued to campaign and lobby on a series of key UNISON priorities, including the recent campaign against cuts to the Concessionary Fares Scheme.

Over the summer, the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) consulted on a range of proposed changes to the *Concessionary Fares (SmartPass) Scheme*. These included options to cut costs which would raise the age of eligibility for the SmartPass from 60 to 65, as well as limiting SmartPass use to off-peak travel and bus-only travel.

The Forum quickly mobilised and identified multiple unintended negative consequences of the proposals, including worsening poverty and social isolation, as well as harming people's mental and physical health. The Forum organised a strong and coordinated campaign throughout the duration of the consultation period. On 16th August, members led a protest outside DfI on Adelaide Street, Belfast.

A range of speakers addressed the crowd, including community activists, academics, members of the Forum and our Regional Secretary. A formal letter of objection was handed to the Director of Public Transport. Members of the Forum spoke to local media and were featured on local radio and TV news.

The protest also attracted a significant amount of online media coverage. UNISON submitted an official response to the

consultation, outlining the widespread negative impacts that cuts to the SmartPass would have on older people, disabled people and wider society.



The Forum has also created an online change.org petition to gather signatures in opposition to the proposed cuts. This petition currently has over 9,000 signatures of support. DfI is currently evaluating all consultation responses before moving forward with any changes to the Concessionary Fares Scheme.

Committees: The following Forum members continue to represent UNISON NI on union bodies and external campaign initiatives:

- UNISON NI Regional Committee – Olive Barry
- National UNISON Retired Members Committee - Martin Gallagher
- UNISON Retired Members' Standing Orders Committee – Noel Muldoon
- UNISON Retired Members' Conference – Paul Allen
- UNISON NDC – Rose Reynolds
- National Pensioners' Convention - Rosaleen Davidson (until June 2023), Mary Ferris, Victor Murphy
- ICTU Biennial Conference - Angela Boorman & Archie Thomson
- ICTU Retired Members' Committee - Angela Boorman and Archie Thomson.

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

■ Young Members' Forum

The Forum held a number of online briefings during 2023. Increasing participation remains a key issue and a priority has been to re-engage with our young members in the post-pandemic environment. The NDC rule that increased the age limit to 30 years old was welcomed by the Forum as former active members have been able to re-engage.

This year the Forum relaunched its newsletter "News Flash" and has scheduled another towards the end of the year.

Work programme: The forum continues with its campaign of educating young members on the role of trade unions and dealing with workplace issues. They have been invited to meet with the Women's, LGBT+ and Welfare committees as part of their ongoing work.



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 Susan Neill, Area Organiser and Caitlin Ni Chathail, Regional Organiser (Education).

■ Health & Safety Group and other member focused H&S activity

This section provides details on the work of the UNISON NI Health & Safety Group as well as some additional member-focused activity undertaken by UNISON NI during the year.

Health and Safety Group: The Group met 3 times during 2023 and members also attended a number of events and training sessions. The Group includes all branch health and safety officers with 13 reps and 10 branches attending its most recent meeting in September.

Work programme: The work programme of the Group includes:

- encouraging stewards in all branches to attend our extensive programme of health & safety training;
- expanding the Group by encouraging participation from all branches;
- supporting H&S officers to continue carrying out inspections in the workplace;
- UNISON reps taking the lead within all employers' health and safety committees.

International Workers Memorial Day – 28 April:

In April 2023 UNISON health and safety reps attended the wreath laying event at the tree in the grounds of Stormont. We had the largest union delegation at the "Remember the Dead, Fight for the Living" event.



Committees and seminars: Carmen Biagioni, (Royal), continues to represent UNISON NI as our rep on the national health & safety committee. UNISON representation on the NIC/ICTU health and safety committee has strengthened with Ray Rafferty (Royal Hospitals) elected Chair and Emma Jane Cullen, (Orchard) elected Joint Vice Chair.

Health & safety recruitment & organising project: UNISON NI continues to maximise the health & safety advice, information and support provided to members and links this in with the union's Be on the Safe Side campaign to identify, mobilise and maximise the current H&S activist and officer base.

Health & safety education and training: The education strand of the project is focused on ensuring that our health and safety 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.



From the UNISON College section of this report we can see that 20 activists (35% women) attended Health & safety modules 1 and 2 training this year. An additional 139 (95% women) attended health and safety in the workplace courses.

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

Service groups

Our two service groups are the Health Service Group and our Local Government and Education Group.

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 54 members of the **Health Service Group**. Its current composition is 72% women, down from 74% last year. The group has met 3 times in formal session during 2023. In addition, the service group established an Industrial action committee with a rolling programme of meetings to oversee the industrial action strategy and tactics.

There are 24 members of the **Local Government and Education Service Group**. Its composition currently stands at 75% women, down from 81% last year. The group met 3 times in formal sessions during 2023 with further briefing sessions taking place throughout the year. The Group is currently establishing an industrial action committee to oversee a schedule of strike action and action short of strike following a successful ballot announced in September 2023.



National representation

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 – 2022/23

UNISON national structures	NI Representatives
NEC	Alastair Long, Margaret McKee and Catherine McKenna
Local Govt Service Group Executive	Daphne Hutchinson and Heather McKinstry
Health Service Group Executive	Maura McKenna; Jill Weir; Deborah Yapicioz
Health Sector Committees	Ambulance – Alastair Long Nursing & Midwifery – Briege McLaughlin Operational Services – Kim Hall Science & Technical – Stephen McNeill
Schools Committee	Samantha Bronze and Anne Taggart
Higher Education	Vacant as a result of privatisation
Women’s Committee	Anne McVicker (Chair) and Deborah Yapicioz
Disability Committee	Amanda Rutherford and Amanda Sweetlove
LGBT	Catherine Connell-Tierney
National Young Members Forum	Lorna McLarnon and Jason Magee
Health and Safety	Carmen Biagioni
National Black Members Committee	Patrick Yu
National Retired Members	Martin Gallagher
Community	Pauline Lagan and Niall McCarroll





Developing membership services

The UNISON College NI

The **UNISON College NI** set out an ambitious programme of work this year in both member learning and activist education.

- **464 places were accessed on our trade union education programme – 68% women**
- **3724 places were accessed on our member learning programme - 89% women**
- **A total 48 activist sessions and 742 member sessions took place**

We embarked on a new project to widen the reach of the College by bringing it directly to workplaces. This has allowed 167 members (96% women) to access our education programme with negotiated paid time off from their employer to complete training.

We have also reinvigorated our *Organising Stewards course* by adding an additional Module 3. Regional Committee have also given a commitment that no new steward will have to wait more than a month to receive training.

Early in the year we lost Pamela Dooley. Pamela was not only a champion of the

Education Programme and a passionate advocate for member learning and activist education, but for the last 20 years she was also Tutor on many of our courses.

Pamela, despite her illness, continued to tutor on our Organising Stewards and Pathways course. She was also working on new modules and courses and mentoring new tutors. Her loss was felt deeply by her students and colleagues. However, Pamela's legacy continues to inspire new tutors to become active in the college and she laid the groundwork that has led to the reinvigoration of many aspects of our organising, equality and leadership content.



■ Trade union education programme

The trade union education courses we deliver are designed to:

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

Our programme has taken place in a very challenging environment this year, with 5 periods of industrial action leading to the reorganisation or postponement of some

courses. Despite this disruption, we have trained 464 activists (68% women) with priority given to *organising stewards* and other accredited courses. We have continued to adapt the programme using a mixture of hybrid, physical and branch based courses.

Our retention rate is up this year, with much fewer non-attendance. This is due to our new membership engagement officer (Caroline Butler) working with branches and activists to ensure that everyone registered has support to attend, including completing external registration forms.

The organising steward: During 2022/23 we trained 179 reps on stage 1, 2 and 3 modules over 19 sessions. This was 58% more than last year. Many of these activists have continued with their education, completing a range of other UNISON courses. While the number of women trained as stewards has increased, the proportion has dropped from 74% to 55% this year. Consequently, Regional Committee will review member engagement across branches and sectors to ensure proportionality.

Stewards, representation & negotiating: In total, 29 activists (76% women) attended 4 general stewards and representation courses during 2022/23. These included *terms and conditions in education* (7 reps); *Agenda for change* (7 reps); *Employment law – discrimination* (8 reps) and *Disability discrimination law* (7 reps). We have continued to encourage activists to use the additional resources in our padlet which we continually update with helpful films links and documents.

Campaigning, equality & human rights: 120 activists (65% women) participated in 5 courses under this section during 2022/23 - a marked increase on the 33 reps who attended last year. Courses included *Climate change* (5 reps); a screening of the LGBT+ *Our journeys film* (48 reps); *Trans ally* (15 reps); *Making equality central to your branch* (29 reps); and *Global solidarity* (23 reps).

Health & safety: 20 activists (35% women) attended *Health & safety modules 1 and 2* training this year. This was a lower number than last year due to many activists being at capacity due to industrial action and ballots. Multiple recruitment attempts were made and adaptations developed, including reducing class sizes so that we didn't have to cancel a course. Our next course has 28 activists registered.

Despite the accredited course seeing lower numbers than usual, our *health and safety in the workplace* offer continue to be very popular with 139 members (95% women) attending courses such as *health and safety for school based staff*, *mental health as a work place*, and *managing challenging behaviour in the classroom* (see Table 12).

Branch officers: This year we offered training for *branch chairs* (7 officers) and *branch treasurers - OLBA* (13 officers). Additional development opportunities for officers include *lay tutor training*, *public speaking*, and *motions & understanding conference*.

Women's development education: This programme returned to full in-person delivery with 32 women attending 5 *Pathways sessions* and 26 women attending 2 *women's health & history sessions*. A further 255 women attended activist development courses, and 3331 women attended member learning courses. Overall, women's participation was 67% in the activist programme and 89% in the member learning programme.



Building new leaders: Significant outreach resulted in women making up 79% of those who attended building new leaders / updating existing leaders courses this year. We trained 5 new *lay tutors* (80% women). This continues to bring in new content and has helped build a programme that can better respond to changing learner needs. Lay tutors visited branch committee meetings and self-organised groups to deliver training. They also offered follow on training for new stewards.

20 activists (95% women) received intensive *media and public speaking training* resulting in an increase in participation in media interviews and contributions to conferences and events. 6 reps attended 4 *ERA refresher* sessions and 7 attended a session on *motions and understanding conference*.

Partnering with self-organised groups: Our self-organised and special issues groups continue to work closely with the programme to deliver courses and advise on content. Courses jointly developed included *trans ally training*, *challenging racism in the workplace*, and sessions for retired members on *digi skills* and *public speaking*.

Table 11: UNISON College trade union education by course and main topic, 1 Oct 2022 to 31 Aug 2023

Course	No. of sessions	No of Student Places		
		Total	F	M
STEWARDS INDUCTION				
The Organising Steward (Module 1)	9	93	52	41
The Organising Steward (Module 2)	8	72	39	33
The Organising Steward (Module 3)	2	14	8	6
2022/23	19	179	99 (55%)	80 (45%)
2021/22	10	113	84 (74%)	29 (26%)
STEWARDS, REPRESENTATION & NEGOTIATING				
Terms and conditions in Education	1	7	4	3
Agenda for Change	1	7	7	0
Employment law - discrimination	1	8	5	3
Disability discrimination law	1	7	6	1
2022/23	4	29	22 (76%)	7 (24%)
2021/22	5	34	27 (79%)	6 (21%)
CAMPAIGNING, EQUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS				
Climate change	2	5	4	1
Our journeys screening	1	48	28	20
Trans ally	1	15	13	2
Making equality central to your branch	3	29	21	8
Global solidarity	1	23	12	11
2022/23	8	120	78 (65%)	42 (35%)
2021/22	4	33	25 (76%)	8 (24%)
HEALTH & SAFETY REPS				
Health & Safety Module 1	2	11	4	7
Health & Safety Module 2	2	9	3	6
2022/23	4	20	7 (35%)	13 (65%)
2021/22	7	75	45 (60%)	30 (40%)
BRANCH OFFICER TRAINING				
Branch Chairs	1	7	7	0
Branch Treasurers (OLBA)	2	13	12	1
2022/23	3	20	19 (95%)	1 (5%)
2021/22	6	45	31 (69%)	14 (31%)
WOMEN’S DEVELOPMENT TRAINING				
Pathways	5	32	32	0
Women’s health & history	2	26	15	0
2022/23	6	58	47 (100%)	0
2021/22	4	76	76	0
BUILDING NEW LEADERS & UPDATING EXISTING LEADERS				
Lay tutor training	1	5	4	1
Public speaking	1	20	19	1
Motion & understanding conference	1	7	3	4
ERA refresher	1	6	4	2
2022/23	4	38	30 (79%)	8 (21%)
2021/22	10	96	74 (77%)	22 (23%)
TOTAL 2022/23	48	464	313 (68%)	151 (32%)
Total 2021/22	53	576	454 (79%)	122 (21%)

■ Member learning programme

This part of the programme offered 742 wide-ranging topics across hundreds of different sessions. 3724 student places were accessed (89% women) and covered areas such as health and safety in the workplace, clinical education, CPD Modules, training in specialist areas and career development opportunities.

Across our **classroom-based and online courses** 697 student places were accessed (87% women).

This year we also packaged a **workplace programme** that could be organised by members or activists in their place of employment and on request. This was additional to the main member learning offer. This extended the reach of the member learning package and allowed members paid time off to participate.

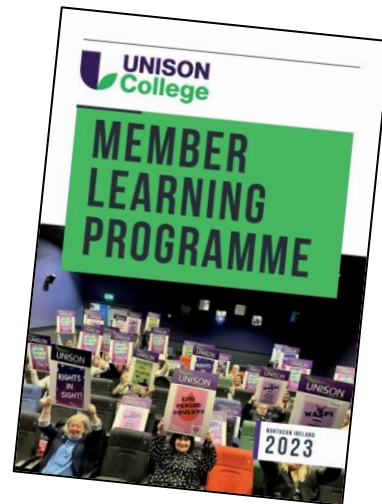
The offer was taken up predominantly by branches and members in the Northwest with 179 attendees (94% women) at health and safety related courses. These included *health and safety for school-based staff* (5 members), *Managing challenging behavior* (87 members), *Suicide first aid* (13 members) and *Bullying at work* (22 members).

E learning: By far the biggest, and increasing, uptake on the Programme was by the 3027 members who accessed learning in their own time through our Nursing Times and Skills Academy **eLearning licenses** and additionally through the open learn site offer from the Open University.

We expect that this is the peak of the engagement in this style of learning and in the coming years there will be a drop in participation. This year we surveyed our members using eLearning. They reported accessing between 5 to 20 courses and gave very positive feedback on their experience stating that this type of learning offers increased flexibility and that they can find more time for learning. Members who use the Nursing times licenses said they accessed between 5-10 courses from the 30 offered.

Feedback from organisers and workplace reps on the programme as a recruitment tool is also consistently positive.

As well as a printed version of the Programme this year we also made it available as a **flipbook** which allows members access on their phone or tablet. This was sent out to all members via text. From our data we can see that 10,000 additional members accessed the Programme in this way.



Continuous professional development continued to be a major contributor to the Programme with courses such as *interpretation of Blood Results*, *Dementia* and *Frailty*.

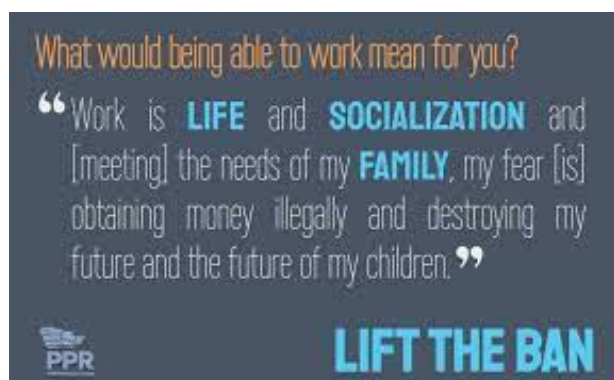
Managed and administered by ICTU, the **Union Learning Fund (ULF)** was established in 2002 by Government to promote trade union learning activity. The Fund recognises the role that unions play in engaging adults who have been disadvantaged or excluded from education in the past, and supports projects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

- IELTS English language and OET language test for healthcare professionals sessions;
- Essential skills and interview skills courses;
- CPD for members;
- Open University modules, including K102 Introduction to health and social care.

Through our Union Learning Fund project we continued to deliver our OET/ILETS preparation classes and K102 project and interview skills for members sitting nursing programme interviews. We once again offered places to members on both the October and February presentations with more uptake coming this year from a broader range of branches including community and voluntary and education branches. Our ULF project this year includes an offer for our members in the education sector with fully funded places on the level 3 supporting teaching and learning course.

UNISON College has signed up to be a member of the **kind economy project** with the PPR Project's Lift the Ban Campaign. Through this we have provided educational opportunities for families who are seeking asylum and their children who have been denied school places. Through this project we have supported 60 women, and 10 young people access e learning licenses, and 30 young people were supported with English language assessment to help them access English qualifications.



Open University: Through our partnership with the Open University we offer *K102 module* to our members. This is the single biggest area of member engagement in the programme. Hundreds of queries about the course come in throughout the year. We offer application support sessions and intensive student finance application support.

This year we contributed to the outreach in the social work and care modules as we extend our reach beyond K102 as a gateway to nursing. This year we offered 113 fully funded places on the K102 module.

Essential skills: Regional Colleges require minimum numbers in order to accredit essential skills courses. We continue to offer places on courses as part of Union Learn Partnerships with 17 members gaining places this year in English, Maths and ICT.



Grants: UNISON continues to actively promote a range of grants for study towards trade union studies, women's studies, GCSEs, vocational courses and the Open University. 19 members were awarded a grant during 2023.

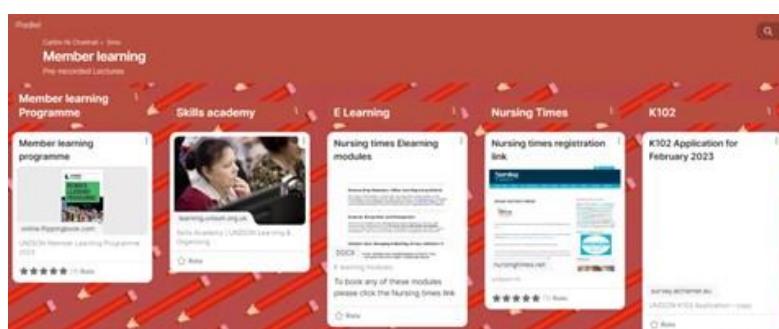
HSC Trust partnerships: In each Trust, local UNISON reps are involved in education/learning groups. The nature of these varies from Trust to Trust and UNISON has a number of seats on each one. The focus of these partnerships is widening participation and developing new pathways for staff to progress in areas such as essential skills. 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 the NI Social Care Council Working Group on HSC qualifications and the Northern Trust Support Workers Learning & Development Group.

The work of UNISON College is supported by Caitlín Ní Chathail, Regional Organiser (Education); Caroline Butler, Member Engagement Organiser and Marianne Buick, Learning & Development Organiser

Table 12: UNISON College member courses and main topic, 1 Oct 2022 to 31 Aug 2023

Course	No. of sessions	No. of student places		
		Total	F	M
Supporting yourself and others				
Bullying at work	1	22	22	0
Caring for adults	2	9	9	0
Suicide First aid	1	13	12	1
Autism awareness	1	15	13	2
Dementia an introduction	2	13	13	0
Dignity at the heart of social care	1	20	19	1
Menopause Awareness	3	20	20	0
Makaton Level 1	1	4	4	0
Makaton Level 2	2	7	7	0
Mental Health as a workplace issue	1	22	22	0
Planning for retirement	1	16	15	1
Mental health awareness	1	13	11	2
Health and safety for school-based staff	1	5	5	5
Let’s talk about consent	1	13	11	2
Supporting you in your job				
Managing Challenging Behaviours in the classroom	3	87	82	5
Managing conflict in the workplace	2	30	26	4
Beyond the Brick	1	31	29	2
Communication from the inside out	2	3	3	0
Interpretation of Blood results	1	10	8	2
Frailty – Growing Older Growing Stronger	1	9	9	0
Autism Awareness	1	15	13	2
Interview skills for Classroom assistants	2	21	20	1
Interview skills for nursing degree	7	62	54	8
K102	24	113	103	10
OET ILETS Preparation classes	42	85	46	37
Essential skills	2	17	6	11
Skills Academy – e learning course access by members	600	752	648	104
Nursing Times – e learning course access by members	30	2275	2080	195
Digital Skills				
Microsoft Word	2	6	6	0
Microsoft Excel	1	4	4	0
Digital Champions	2	12	11	1
TOTAL 2022/23	742	3724	3331 (89%)	396 (11%)
2021/22	757	2872	2406 (84%)	466 (16%)



There for you - Welfare services

UNISON NI Welfare Group: The Group has 25 members (79% women) with 21 branches participating. The Group continues to encourage more branch welfare officers to attend meetings 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 Welfare AGM is scheduled for 27 November 2023 and will be an online event.

On 25th September the Group organised a joint seminar with our Women's Committee on gambling awareness and loan-sharking and its increase due to the cost-of-living crisis. The event was opened by the Regional Secretary and was facilitated by the charity Gamcare in conjunction with Danske bank. The two committees propose to organise further joint events in the future.

Several Group members attended the There for You AGM in Brighton on 13 June. The event took place during UNISON NDC.

Three Group members are trained mentors and available to support newly elected branch welfare officers. Further branch welfare officer training is scheduled in the coming year to support newly elected reps.

Branch donations: NI branches continue to make regular donations to There for You and over 50% are signed up to the There for You lottery.

Grants received: There for You received 24 applications for assistance from NI members during the period Jan-June 2023 and 11 of these have now been completed with a total of £3,567.67 paid to the members. There was a high volume of applications for the Winter Fuel grant, Energy grant and school uniform grant from NI members.



Regional advice service: Many members are referred to Tar Isteach for benefit advice and support. This is a much-needed service which has been a lifeline for many low paid members especially those finding themselves in ill health.

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

UNISON Living - Financial Services

UIB LV have not visited NI since our last Regional Council. However, they report communications with all branches, supporting a number of virtual AGM meetings and sending promotional material. Abbey Autoline and Lighthouse maintained a physical presence in support of our branches.

UNISON Protect (formerly UIB) have provided NI branches with materials and information requested from delegates visiting their stands at UNISON Conferences. They ran a regional insurance promotion in February 2023 with the distribution to members for free £5000 accidental death insurance. This

resulted in 1,076 registrations. 3503 UNISON Protect NI policies were sold between 1 Sept 2022 and 16 Aug 2023, a 58% increase on the number of policies reported last year.

UNISON Protect NI policies sold 1 Sept 2022 – 16 Aug 2022	
Free £5,000 accidental death	3,028
Accident Protection Plan	43
50+ Accident Plan	17
Life Cover	95
Free rewards	297
Prepaid	23
Total:	3,503

LV report a 4% year on year increase in the number of policies held in NI. They attended Regional Council in 2022 and will be attending again this year.

Abbey Autoline continued to offer support to our branches throughout 2023 and have reported an increased 9411 motor policies and 1341 home policies sold since Nov 2022.

Lighthouse continued to support NI members with services delivered by a team of local advisers who deliver seminars, webinars and

undertake individual appointments. 105 members attended 15 events over the year.

Lighthouse event type	No. of Events	No. of Attendees
Seminar	1	13
Telephone Surgery	10	26
General Surgery	2	7
Webinars	2	42
Total	15	88
Total number of additional appointments		105

Legal services

The following is an update report from our solicitors Thompsons NI to the end of August 2023 on cases and activity.



■ UNISON Personal Injury Cases - Sept 2022 to Aug 2023

Table 13 - UNISON Personal Injury Cases from Sept 2022 to Aug 2023

	2022-2023	2021-2022
Cases received	112	187
Cases closed	155	158
Cases won	81	71
Cases lost	0	0
Cases discontinued/turned down	50	65
Cases where no contact from client	24	22
Turnaround time average	22 months	17 months
Damages	£1,132,919	£688,834
Average Damages	£13,986	£9,702

The following are some notable outcomes:

- **£9,000 for Nursing Auxiliary.** The member sustained a burn to their left hand whilst filling a faulty flask with coffee.
- **£12,500 for Staff Nurse.** The member was headbutted by a patient during the course of their employment.
- **£75,000 for Nurse.** The member sustained serious injuries when they were pushed by a patient and fell backwards landing awkwardly on the floor.
- **£65,000 for Support Services Assistant.** The member sustained a serious fracture to their left leg when they tripped and fell over a raised bracket on the floor.
- **£100,000 for Ambulance Driver.** The member suffered multiple injuries when they were involved in a serious road traffic accident.
- **£6,500 for Healthcare Assistant.** The member sustained a needlestick injury during the course of their employment in a private nursing home.
- **£8,500 for Cook.** The member suffered whiplash type injuries following a road traffic accident.

■ 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.

£3,000.00 for Healthcare Worker. The member appealed their employer's decision to make them redundant from their current role, and the proposed redeployment to an alternative role, which they did not believe to be a fair alternative.



■ Extended legal services, training and events

Free wills service: Members were able to avail of the Free Wills Service.

Criminal Law: Criminal representation was provided for members by way of Zoom meetings and also 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 where required. We also advised members on a number of criminal queries which did not amount to police involvement.

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.

Training & events: Courses, seminars and events were able to take place in

person this year. Solicitors from the ER and PI department provided services as tutors on courses organised by UNISON and provided speakers and information material for union seminars and events, including branch meetings to discuss particular aspects of union legal services.



OBJECTIVE 2: BARGAINING & BARGAINING FOR EQUALITY



Our bargaining and equality priorities

The collapse in May 2022 of devolved government in Northern Ireland has caused havoc across the public sector and made it extremely difficult for trade unions to defend our members interests. UNISON has stepped up from day one of this political crisis challenging everywhere we can the impact on working people. The emergence of the cost-of-living crisis and high inflation has been particularly harsh in NI. But we have not been deterred from standing up and fighting back.



All of this formed the backdrop to UNISON NI's participation in the substantial discussion and efforts made to form a common claim across the NHS for 2023/24. Our union's UK wide pay claim demanding an inflation busting pay rise, formed the main basis of our campaigning work on pay over the last 12 months.

We have lived in a world where our ability to deliver to our members has been undermined by the absence of an Assembly, an Executive, and Ministers with designated budgets.

UNISON's 'No going back to normal' campaign has been the foundation of all our campaign priorities and is reflected in our bargaining agenda at all levels. It has come more starkly into focus since the cost-of-living crisis.

We are currently assessing the impact of Long Covid. We continue to review workplace policies on sickness absence schemes in order to ensure continuing protection and support for workers.

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 the NI Government.

Our bargaining teams: Our regional multi-union bargaining teams in health and education continue to be led by UNISON as lead secretaries and joint secretaries. The UNISON negotiating teams are a combination of UNISON staff and senior lay bargainers.

Outside of mainstream public sector bargaining, we continue to secure bargaining rights with hundreds of employers. This work has been strengthened by effective partnerships between lay and staff negotiators and by joint branch and cross-sectoral working.



Evidence to the Low Pay Commission on 2024 minimum wage rates: As part of a UK wide consultation on minimum wage rates for 2024, UNISON met with the Low Pay Commission in Belfast to provide evidence and make recommendations for the rate for 2024.

At the meeting UNISON recommended:

- a 'national living wage' of at least two-thirds of average earnings in 2024;
- that a course is set for raising the National Minimum Wage (NMW), to £15 per hour;
- the harmonisation of NMW rates to a single rate for all age groups;
- addressing the critical issue of poverty rates of weekly income;
- the strengthening of legislation to limit the use of zero hour contracts and prevent

bogus classification of workers as self-employed,

- more robust monitoring and enforcement of NMW non-compliance, particularly in the social care sector.



Maintaining our equality, consultation and negotiating rights: This work is undertaken by bargaining teams, our policy team and the RMT. While we have been unable to progress the commitments on employment rights contained in the New Decade, New Approach agreement which has been abandoned due to the absence of government, we are still pressing Government Departments and employers on our key agenda issues. These include:

- implementation of agreed policies secured on women's rights including menopause,

domestic violence and period poverty. We continue to raise questions on the provision of abortion services, seek pay audits with the focus on equal pay and the gender pay gap;

- implementation of the key demands from the expert groups that are working on the equality strategies;
- enhanced protection for our black and migrant workers 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 NDNA on the living wage and action to promote rights and eliminate discrimination.

Following the passing of the new EU Directive on minimum wage and collective bargaining it has been agreed, through ICTU, that we will press for equivalent legislation in NI. UNISON will play a lead role in the drafting and will co-ordinate through the North South committee of ICTU.

Bargaining in health

Pay campaign: As part of a UNISON wide strategy to highlight the impact of the cost of living crisis on our members and our demand for an inflation busting pay uplift, we commenced a programme of industrial action in December 2022 in health and social services.

While most health trade unions agreed with UNISON's broad strategy, the RCN focus on a nurse specific pay agreement, a clear breach of Agenda for Change, will present ongoing problems.

We balloted our entire Trust health and social services membership in October 2022. We did not have to meet the punitive 50% turnout threshold imposed on unions in GB. Given the extensive direct engagement with our members before the ballot we were confident

that we would secure a decision for strike and action short of strike, and we did.



The inclusion of ASoS was a wise decision, as we have been using the pressure this has created to leverage some specific gains for our members.

NI was the first UNISON region to commence strike action on December 12th 2022. That day we also commenced 2 weeks of action short of strike involving all UNISON members in all parts of the health service.



By the time we gather for Regional Council our members will have had four rounds of strike action and 11 months of action short of strike. During this time our UNISON members in Scotland, England and Wales have negotiated and received pay uplifts.

The collapse of the Executive, and absence of a Health Minister, has been used by the UK government to deny pay parity for NI health workers. For months now we have run a concerted campaign focusing on the UK Secretary of State for NI to address the exclusion of health workers from the implementation of the PRB recommendation. We have demanded that he include funding for this uplift in his budget preparation for NI. We have pursued these arguments while also sticking to the UNISON demand for an inflation busting pay uplift.

Change without consent: Governance and management of the health service is now in the hands of the senior civil service team. We are assessing the implications of this and are challenging on whether the Restart programme is being used as a smokescreen to implement changes to democratic and governance structures to the detriment of the service and our members.

Removing exorbitant spend on agency use: The pay dispute in 2019, besides achieving the reinstatement of pay parity, also secured a framework agreement on tackling safe staffing and curbing the accelerating spend on agency cover. UNISON has led joint union interventions on these two major issues.

Discussions commenced in early 2020 but these were disrupted by the pandemic. We have been able to move ahead at a policy level with a push on the Department to prepare safe staffing legislation.

Anne Speed, as lead joint secretary, participates on a new project oversight board on agency spend that has been established by the Department. She also leads a team of UNISON bargainers in related workstreams.

Progress on reducing off-contract agency spend has been slow. The number of workforce vacancies across all parts of the health service has emerged as one of the most serious burdens health workers dealing with the pandemic have had to endure. Therefore, the reliance on agency cover has become very difficult to remove.



We also remain vigilant on the emerging issue of an increase in on-contract agency spend. Tackling these issues remains a key priority for UNISON. Our goal is to reinstate safe staffing levels based on a sustainable and stable permanent workforce. To date we have secured:

- new procurement frameworks for the use of agency;
- a policy statement issued by the previous Health Minister to guide corporate structures across the health service in the reduction of agency use; and
- a commitment by corporate health leaders to engage with trade unions in each organisation to achieve this aim.

Negotiations also continue with Health Trusts on our demands to:

- protect and maintain access to overtime,
- resist the extension of bank working for ancillary staff,
- challenge the over reliance on agency workers and temporary contracted staff,
- end the casualisation of the workforce.

In tackling nursing agency spend across all Health Trusts, UNISON has secured enhanced critical shift payments for nursing staff in areas such as Intensive Care Units across all Health Trusts. The reduction and reliance of agency workers in nursing is critical to ensuring safety for both patients and staff and the continuity of care.

Ending casualisation at health employer level:

Negotiations are ongoing with Health Trusts on the over reliance on agency workers and temporary contracted staff and ending the casualisation of the workforce.

In *Belfast HSC Trust* and *South Eastern HSC Trust* UNISON continues to work with both Trusts on the review of the admin workforce to convert agency contracts and temporary contracted posts into permanent jobs.



In the *Northern HSC Trust* 98 staff on temporary contracts of over 4 years have been given permanent contracts. Work continues with the Trust to convert an additional 85 staff on temporary contracts to permanent contracts of employment.

Also in this Trust UNISON was successful in halting the progression of bank contracts in support services and stopping the introduction of vehicle/driver tracking systems.

Our work has also focused on challenging the Trust's heavy reliance on the use of agency workers and bank staff for additional shifts and additional hours and for staff to be offered Agenda for Change additional hours and overtime rates for cover. Engagement has also intensified with the Trust to reverse the outsourcing of domiciliary care services and staff recruitment.

Agenda for Change 'Pay Max'/Refresh: As part of our 'AfC Pay Max'/Refresh strategy, UNISON branches in each Health Trust have had many successes in securing increased re-banding outcomes for staff through the AFC 'Changed Job Process.'



In *Belfast HSC Trust*, job descriptions have been submitted, including re-banding for admin and clerical staff, ward clerks, cooks, healthcare assistants and domiciliary care staff and other groups.

In the *South Eastern HSC Trust*, following the successful re-banding of domiciliary care workers from Band 2 to Band 3, backpay was secured back to November 2021 for these workers. Other successes for staff include family support workers moving from Band 2 to Band 3 and maintenance workers moving from Band 3 to Band 4. Work is continuing on re-evaluating patient experience posts and admin posts across the Trust.

In the *Southern HSC Trust* UNISON has secured agreement that a large number of agency workers in support services will be moved to permanent contracts. We also negotiated redeployments for members impacted by the reduction of services in Daisy Hill Hospital

In the *Northern HSC Trust*, negotiations are ongoing with the expectation that engineers and electricians will be successful in their job re-banding. Revised job descriptions have also been submitted for job evaluation for support workers, healthcare assistants, domestic supervisors and homecare officers.

In the *Western HSC Trust* work is ongoing with job evaluations for a range of staff including domiciliary care and reablement staff.

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS):

Over the past year UNISON has continued its work with the Trust to convert agency vehicle cleaning operative (VCO) roles into permanent posts within the organisation. In 2022, this resulted in 20 VCOs gaining permanent employment with the Trust.

UNISON has also maintained with the Trust that there will be no reduction in temporary station supervisor positions – which are required to support the increasing demands on the service - until a review of operational structures and service demand is completed.



Engagement with nursing sector structures:

We maintain our regional representation on the Central Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Committee and the NI Professional Education Council.

NHS Pensions: Discussion on specific remedies to pension scheme adjustments in NI was delayed by the absence of analysis but will now restart. UNISON's rep on the Pension Scheme Advisory Board is Stephanie Greenwood.

Safe staffing legislation: We continue to work alongside other health trade unions to

progress the development of safe staffing legislation, further to the commitments made by the Minister for Health in the 2020 Framework Agreement that led to the suspension of our industrial action on pay parity and safe staffing issues.



We have emphasised to the Department that there must be clear reporting and accountability mechanisms in relation to workforce planning and investment. As part of our campaigning during the Assembly election, UNISON called on all parties to prioritise proper workforce planning across health and social care, urging them to move to introduce safe staffing legislation as early as possible in a new Assembly.

Social Care Forum: We had secured the establishment of a Social Care Forum (which covers the use of the public subsidy to private providers) to include a focus on pay and terms and conditions for workers delivering care in the homecare and care home sectors.

The delivery of this initiative has been disrupted and delayed by the absence of ministerial direction. The Department has created an alternative forum which has all the signs of a manoeuvre to reduce the presence of trade union influence.

We are currently engaged in a fractious discussion with the Department on determining if two forums can co-exist. The key concern for us is how and where we can influence and bargain for the rights, terms and conditions of the social care workforce.



Mileage subsidy issues: A significant issue for Trust and private sector homecare workers has been the impact of the energy crisis on the value of the subsidies they receive for travel in their job. The cost of fuel puts real pressure on the capacity of staff to pay fuel costs weeks in advance of receiving the actual subsidy from their employer.

Following the mobilisation of the workforce at employer and community level, we managed to secure an enhance subsidy for direct NHS staff which has now been extended for almost 12 months.

The issue of mileage subsidies is on the trade union sides agenda at NHS Staff Council. In the meantime, we will continue to press the Trusts to make local adjustments where needed.

Success was also achieved in securing the return of VAT monies from the *Northern Trust* for staff who had availed of the Trust car leasing scheme in the last five years. This will benefit a significant number of staff who should receive a rebate of between £500 to £5000, depending on individual circumstances.

Private homecare: A new UNISON UK wide project to build our membership in social care is now supported in NI by 2 new Local Organiser posts dedicated to building our density. For the coming year their work will be led by an assigned Regional Organiser. This team is now fully engaged in organising and campaigning activity to recruit social care workers to UNISON.

This recruitment and organising activity will be enhanced by the strategic interventions made at a policy and bargaining level. The following are some examples.

- Following intensive negotiations with the owners of *Ann's Care Homes*, UNISON has maintained the recognition agreement which transferred from Four Seasons. Access to care homes was agreed for UNISON Local Organisers for recruiting and organising initiatives.
- UNISON met several times with *Beaumont Care* throughout the past year following the TUPE transfer of our members in 29 nursing homes across Northern Ireland. We have ensured that our members' terms and conditions of employment have been honoured with the transfer.
- *Electus* currently owns 9 private nursing homes across Northern Ireland. UNISON has met with senior management from the company and a recognition agreement for sole voluntary recognition has been submitted. The decision is awaited.
- Following meetings with senior management of *Kilmorey Care* a pay offer of between 3.5% to 8%, based on length of service was accepted by UNISON members who were balloted on the offer.

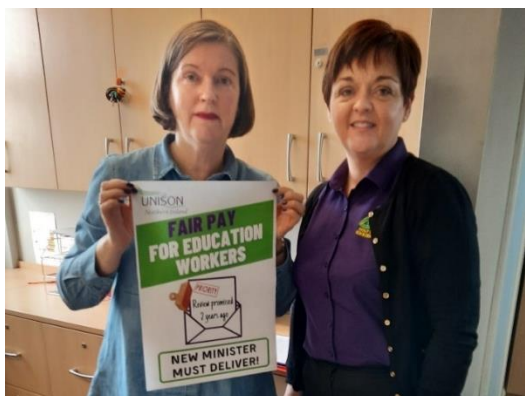


Bargaining in education

As with health, the absence of an Executive and Minister has detrimentally impacted on both education services and the workforce.

Education services have been reeling from the impact of the Department of Education's demand at the end of 2022 to achieve £120m savings in education cuts. This scenario was further compounded by the severity of the budget released by the NI Secretary of State in early 2023.

Education Authority members and school workforce: Throughout this year our membership employed by the Education Authority have seen developments in the NJC Trade union side pay claim.



Our service group was firmly of the view that the employer's offer should have been put to a direct vote of the workforce. They were not confident that to reject and go straight to an industrial ballot was the right decision. Their preference was to await developments in the England and Wales ballot while at the same time pursuing movement from the EA on the pay and grading review promised in 2019.

As it has transpired, the UNISON NJC committee has now decided to secure the support of other unions to seek implementation of the employer's offer. We await developments on this front. In the meantime our members have voted for strike action on the pay and grading review and proposed cuts.

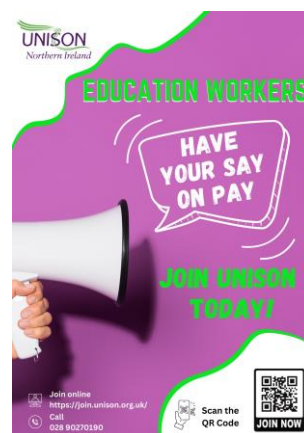
Our members will not accept the excuse that the Department will not release funding.

Neither will they accept the omission of funding from the Secretary of State's NI budget.

Throughout 2023 our bargaining team continued working 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. Our lay team participates directly in all the EA bargaining directorates - operational services (estates, catering, cleaning, transport); children & young peoples services; education (curriculum and services); finance; HR.

Contentious issues are:

- development of the new EA payroll EA1;
- blended contracts for classroom assistants;
- increased responsibility of supervisory staff in catering and cleaning without proper reward;
- the need for a framework recognition agreement with Voluntary Grammar schools and the ever growing integrated sector (all individual employers);
- growing concern around resources for EA youth services;
- implication of the Brazil judgement on the calculation of annual leave for term time workers.



Integrated and Voluntary Grammar Schools:

Our key goal is to secure a regional negotiating forum for these members on their pay, terms and conditions. This will require ministerial support and policy direction from the Department.

Bargaining in further & higher education and libraries

Further education: UNISON, as part of Joint Trade Union Side (JTUS), met with management and the Department of Economy (DoE), to discuss the local pay claim. Negotiations continue with the colleges to remain within the National Joint Council (NJC), framework. The key elements of the pay and conditions claim include:

- all grades moving up 2 spinal column points;
- a reduction in the working week to 35 hours with no pay detriment;
- Covid 19 recognition (Cost of Living) payment of £1,000 net;
- 2 days' additional annual leave;
- improvements to mileage rates;
- a commitment to maintain pay above the Real Living Wage going forward.

A response from JTUS has been submitted to the Department's public consultation on colleges spending plans for 2023/2024, while engagement is ongoing with the DoE on their current review of FE's Delivery Model.

Higher education - University of Ulster: After succeeding in negotiations with the Ulster University to ensure that our privatised members received the real living wage in 2022, workers received the 2023 increased real living wage rate of £10.90 per hour. The increase applied to staff in cleaning, portering and security with pay differentials being protected. The University is now signed up to the Real Living Wage Foundation and will need to ensure third party contractors continue to pay the real living wage rates to their workers.

UNISON's two University branches are also developing an 'In-House Campaign 2023/2024' with the Bidvest Noonan contract for cleaning, portering and security which is out for tender in December. Privatised in 2013, UNISON will be campaigning for a return to these services in-house. The campaign will involve lobbying MLA's, Councillors and MP's. The campaign has

received support from UCU, UNITE, and the Students Union.



Negotiations are ongoing with **Libraries NI** to agree a process for job evaluation for library branch managers and assimilation onto NJC pay scales. Failure on the employer's part to progress matters resulted in UNISON and other trade unions consulting members with a view to commencing a ballot for industrial action. UNISON members overwhelmingly indicated that they would be prepared to take strike action and action short of strike.

Proposals from UNISON and other trade unions to settle the dispute include:

- agreeing a process for job evaluation and assimilation onto NJC scales;
- a one-off payment for Branch Library Managers in recognition of the historical background to the dispute;
- a commitment from Libraries NI to work with trade unions on an Organisation and Structure Review and a review of front-line job descriptions.

Concerns have also been brought forward with Libraries NI arising from the draconian cuts to staffing across the organisation, in particular, the ending and reduction of agency workers' contracts, many of whom have been working in Libraries NI for a significant period. The results of these cuts are placing additional severe pressures on our staff who are left to provide the frontline services.

Other sectoral bargaining

Mid & East Antrim Council: Following a joint trade union pay & conditions claim and negotiations, the NJC pay award of £1925 for 2022/23 was awarded; staff were moved up two spinal points on the salary scale; the job evaluation model will be reviewed; and a review will be undertaken to convert casual posts to permanent posts. Negotiations are also ongoing with the Council on an organisational wide service structure review.

Private sector: *Arjo UK* staff were awarded a pay increase of 4.5% for 2023. In recognition of the financial challenges staff were facing with cost of living increases, the pay award was bought forward to 1st January 2023.

Bryson Recycling and *Camphill Community Glencraig* returned resounding 'yes' votes for strike action. This resulted in a series of intensive negotiations with both employers that achieved improved pay awards. In *Bryson*, drivers and loaders received an increase of between £1000 to £1200 on their annual salary along with the introduction of a daily payment for helping out other crews on collections in other areas. In *Camphill Community* staff were awarded an additional lump sum payment.

Community & voluntary sector: Our members in the C&V sector are among the hardest hit by the punitive UK Government budget. Details of the impact and our interventions on the European Social Fund, Supporting People and the withdrawal of grants and core funding is set out in section 3.

In the C&V Sector we continue to work for better pay and improved terms and conditions of employment. The following are examples:

- Agreement has been reached with *Apex Housing* on a job evaluation scheme and a programme of job evaluation for support and direct labour staff. Over 100 posts have been identified for job evaluation and work has begun with UNISON on evaluating posts. Negotiations are ongoing in relation to new enhanced pay rates for staff working Christmas Day, Boxing Day and other holiday periods along with reducing agency spend.
- In the *Simon Community NI* we are reviewing policies including shared parental leave,

maternity and adoption leave, and a new domestic abuse leave policy. For 2023, staff also received a pay award of £1000 on each pay point. New overtime rates were also introduced for staff working additional hours beyond full time contracted hours.

- In *De Paul Ireland* negotiations were concluded on a services review and a new service delivery model. This involved changes to service delivery, the management structure, and job roles. UNISON ensured there were no compulsory redundancies as part of the review, an increase in pay for new posts created, and pay increases for additional duties added to existing posts. Staff also received a pay award between 4%-5% for 2023.
- *First Housing & Support Services* – in February 2023 all permanent staff received a £1000 cost of living payment followed by a 2.5% pay award in April. Work was also undertaken on a staff handbook review which included changes to a several policies including Parental Bereavement Leave and Domestic Abuse, and the introduction of an Endometriosis policy.

At the time of writing hundreds of members do not know if they will have a job after October 2023 or if the schemes and organisations they work for will survive. Among the hardest hit are the very organisations designed to promote equality and rights. We are co-ordinating with member organisations directly where we have UNISON reps and also through our Equality Coalition campaigns.

Youth justice: In March 2022, the Ministers of Health and Justice decided that the best way to progress the Regional Care and Justice Campus Programme (and to address concerns raised relating to the mixing of young people and staff from both care and justice systems), was for both Lakewood Regional Secure Care Centre and Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre to continue to operate independently, but for efforts to be made to harmonise services between them. UNISON's aim is to ensure a seamless transition for staff with improved outcomes for the young people.

OBJECTIVE 3:

CAMPAIGNING, PUBLIC POLICY AND SUPPORTING THE PEACE PROCESS



WHY CAMPAIGN?

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 the future. During the current cost of living crisis facing our members, effective campaigning has never been more important.

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.

We are determined to get the message across to ALL our members that the union is campaigning about issues such as:

- the crisis in public spending, the overall economic situation and the cost of living crisis;
- their rights as workers and their jobs and conditions in specific sectors;
- the health and education of their children;
- reforming our health and social care system to create a public health model for them and their families which aims to eradicate health inequalities;
- care for the oldest and most vulnerable, and their families;
- mental health care for them and their families;
- 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, unemployment, ill health, and lack of skills and qualifications;
- building human rights and equality to tackle the discrimination they face;
- working together to build the local movement on peace;
- targeting social need so that no one gets left behind.

Current political context

2023 marked the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. Regrettably, this milestone coincided with the continued absence of an Executive and Assembly at Stormont.

The absence of the democratic institutions has also coincided with a sustained crisis in public spending and prolonged industrial action across the public and private sectors. This has included sustained action by UNISON members across health and social services, with our members in education having also recently voted for industrial action.

In a year in which the UK Government has celebrated the achievement of the Good Friday Agreement, it has imposed major cuts on public services and the community and voluntary sector through the NI budget. Those already experiencing poverty and disadvantage will be most adversely affected.

UNISON, alongside the wider trade union movement, has spoken out against these budget cuts from the outset, highlighting the major impact they will have on public services. We will continue to oppose the erosion of our

public services. These cuts are contrary to the promotion of equality of opportunity and the better social and economic future for all that should be the legacy of the Good Friday Agreement.



We are equally concerned not only at the lack of real commitment by the UK Government to the core provisions of our Peace Agreement, but also by its irresponsible and provocative actions in bringing forward legislation to dismantle core elements of it.

We will continue to campaign for a restoration of devolved Government on the basis of genuine power-sharing within a framework of equality and human rights and against the ongoing cuts to our public services.

■ The impact of exiting the EU

As we have previously reported, the impact of EU exit will be felt throughout the membership. The work needed to secure protection for our members' rights and livelihoods is extensive and ongoing.

In February 2023, the EU Commission and UK Government announced the Windsor Framework, which made changes to the Protocol on Ireland/NI which had been included within the Withdrawal Agreement and had been in force since 2021.

A key concern of UNISON, as the UK has exited the EU, has been to ensure that the rights of our members are protected. EU law underpins a range of key workers' rights in NI, and outside of the EU there is a risk that these rights can be undermined. The UK will no longer be required to develop laws in line with developments at the EU level. 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.

Within the Protocol, the UK committed to the non-diminution of some rights contained within the Good Friday Agreement as a result of exiting the EU. The Protocol further provides for the establishment of a 'Dedicated Mechanism' comprised of the NI Human Rights Commission and NI Equality Commission to monitor the implementation of these commitments.

Alongside ICTU and our allies across the rights and equality sector, we are regularly engaging with the new Dedicated Mechanism to direct its attention towards issues of concern. An initial analysis by Professor Chris McCrudden is that the provisions of the Windsor Framework do not impact on the non-diminution commitments and that they are unaffected.

A key focus of our work over the last 12 months has been responding to the **Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act** as it progressed through Parliament. As originally proposed, the Bill set a deadline of 31st December 2023 as a 'sunset clause' after which pieces of retained EU law across the UK would have ceased to have effect unless steps

were taken to restate or revise them. This could have included laws devolved to NI that affect workers here. Working across UNISON and with our allies across civic society, we raised numerous concerns about the impact of the Bill on the non-diminution commitments, if laws within the scope of this commitment were repealed.

The UK Government eventually moved to remove the 'sunset clause' from the Bill, following the opposition from UNISON and wider civic society. However, concerns remain with regards to how the powers contained in the Act could be used to rewrite laws affecting our members with limited scrutiny. The Act also alters the status of retained EU law in the UK, potentially impacting on how the courts may apply such laws in future.



As the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act came into force, the UK Government was consulting on changes to the law in areas like the Working Time Regulations, holiday pay and TUPE. As employment law is a devolved matter in NI, the Department of Business and Trade confirmed further to this that the specific policy proposals in the consultation document apply in relation to GB only, not NI, and that it will be for NI Ministers to decide whether they may want to consider similar policies, and amendments to NI legislation, in due course. UNISON will oppose any effort to weaken comparable employment rights in NI.

We will be working alongside NIC-ICTU and our allies across civic society to ensure that the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act does not lead to the removal or weakening of key protections for workers.

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

The **Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA)** sets out the future relationship between the EU and UK. Whilst this contains some limited commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights by the UK, the TCA provisions on the 'level playing field' only relate to not lowering current levels of labour and social protections to the extent that any reductions may affect trade or investment. As part of the TCA, the UK Government has established a Domestic Advisory Group (DAG) on the TCA. Policy Officer, John Patrick Clayton, represents ICTU on this body.

UNISON has endorsed the **Common Travel Area campaign**, alongside the Northwest Migrant Forum. The campaign aims to raise awareness about the CTA, and to challenge

discrimination against non-CTA nationals living, working and studying across both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland. The campaign is calling on both the UK and Irish Governments to extend the rights under the CTA to all legal residents across both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland.



■ Economic strategy

NI budget: The last 12 months have seen public service budgets in NI in sustained crisis. In April, the Secretary of State moved to set a budget for NI for 2023/24, referring to the need to arrange for the *"repayment of the £297 million overspend from the 2022-23 Budget"* to be taken forward by *"committing any future in year Barnett consequential for 2023-24 to repaying the Reserve claim."* In effect, this position means that any additional funding that NI may have received as a consequence of spending on public services in England will now be offset against this *"overspend"*.

The position adopted by the Secretary of State in committing any future Barnett consequential to repaying the overspend from the 22-23 budget presents a serious barrier to resolving the dispute UNISON members working within health and social care services are involved in and may have serious consequences for NJC pay. Any additional funding that should flow to NI as a result of new public spending to implement the Agenda for Change pay offer that UNISON members in England have voted to accept, may now be

used to repay the 22-23 overspend rather than provide resources to the Department of Health to make a decent pay offer here.

The NI Fiscal Council has reported in its initial summary of the budget that the NI Civil Service believes it will have to find £800 million this year given the pressures on budgets.

Subsequently, the Head of the Civil Service has written to the Secretary of State to indicate that Departments had *"reached the limit"* of what they can do to manage budget pressures this year and that an overspend of this year's budget was *"unavoidable"*.

UNISON has spoken out against these budget cuts from the outset, highlighting the major impact they will have on public services. We responded to Equality Impact Assessments conducted by the Department of Health, Department of Education, Department for Communities, and the Executive Office on the impact of cuts across public services delivered or funded through their Departments (see later in this section).

We are continuing to work alongside wider civic society in opposing the cuts and continue to call for 'No Going Back' to the social and economic conditions caused by over a decade of austerity pre-pandemic.

We have called on all parties within any new Executive to commit to seek resources for public spending in NI, which:

- allows Government to invest in our public services so they can be rebuilt;
- ensures decent pay for workers;

- addresses sustained levels of poverty; and
- builds a fairer and more equal society.

UNISON has been at the forefront of the NIC-ICTU '**Workers Demand Better**' campaign calling for action to address the cost of living crisis. UNISON branches and representatives have supported the campaign through taking part in protests and demonstrations, attending public meetings, speaking at events and through sustained industrial action.

■ Public Procurement Policy

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.

We continue to campaign for best practice in the operation of public procurement. This requires the application of the following to be placed at the centre of this process:

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

It also requires application of the NI Executive **Scoring Social Value policy** which states that (i) any company delivering services for Government will have to pay staff working on that contract the real living wage as calculated by the Living Wage Foundation, and that (ii) tenders for public contracts must be assessed on the basis of social value as well as cost and quality, with some social values measures, including 'fair work' practices, being mandatory.

The 'fair work' practices include compliance with relevant employment, equality and health and safety law and human rights standards; adherence to relevant collective agreements; and the adoption of fair work practices as defined by the Carnegie Trust, which includes pay, terms and conditions and worker voice/representation.

The Scoring Social Value policy is a NI Executive policy and is mandatory for Government Departments and Non-Departmental Public Bodies. The policy makes clear that any additional costs arising from this condition should be built into business cases. The policy further requires continual monitoring of the delivery of the social value included in public contracts.

Working alongside our bargaining structures, we continue to seek to ensure that the policy is applied and implemented in relation to social care procurement, engaging with the Trusts, the Department of Health and calling for this to be a priority for the Social Care Fair Work Forum referred to later in this section.



Our ongoing campaigns for an Executive Anti-Poverty strategy are set out later in this section. Our interventions here have related to full implementation of the Scoring Social Value policy as part of a range of measures needed to reduce in-work poverty.

■ Employment and trade union law

We have no legislative Assembly in place. Consequently, the outstanding commitments in the New Decade, New Approach agreement for an “enhanced focus within the Programme for Government on creating good jobs and protecting workers’ rights” cannot currently be met. Parties agreed to progress several actions, including a commitment to the NI Executive becoming a Living Wage employer, to ban zero hours contracts and to devolve powers to set minimum wage levels.

Whilst some progress was made on securing the Living Wage, much more needs to be done to protect and enhance workers’ rights. Working closely across ICTU, a priority demand of the trade union movement is for a new Executive to take forward strong, comprehensive employment legislation for NI, giving effect to commitments made under NDNA. A core part of this will be the demand for the right to collective bargaining for all workers. A new Executive must also move to prohibit zero-hours contracts as set out in NDNA.

In our motion to ICTU BDC 2023, we called on the Executive Council, working with the NI Committee and affiliates, to develop model legislation enshrining workers’ and trade union rights, including the right to strike and the right to collectively bargain, and to campaign for such legislation to be passed as soon as possible.

We are mindful that in the Republic of Ireland, a High Level Working Group on collective bargaining, formed from trade unions, business representatives and government was formed to review collective bargaining and industrial relations. As part of this group’s work, a focus was placed on the new EU Directive on adequate minimum wages, which will require EU member states to enhance collective bargaining coverage.

We require the return of Government here to introduce similar legislation.

■ The climate emergency, environment and just transition

This past summer has seen unprecedented levels of climate migration across the world, record-breaking temperatures, wildfires and flooding that have killed hundreds of people and displaced many more.

Locally, NI is facing a number of significant ecological challenges, including:

- Continued gold mining in the Sperrins;
- the dumping of raw sewage and slurry in our rivers and lakes;
- toxic algae in Lough Neagh;
- proposed gas caverns at Islandmagee;
- plans for an oil terminal at Cloghan Point.

In this context, UNISON has continued to expand upon our climate and sustainability work over the past year.

Our Green UNISON NI Network is comprised of members across NI, and meets online on a regular basis. The Network also has a newsletter and WhatsApp group for sharing

relevant news and information. Some members of the Network are simply interested in climate issues and activism, and others sit on their branch committees as newly-elected environmental officers.



We will continue to seek that public sector employers provide agreed workplace facility time for environmental officers to negotiate on just transition and decarbonisation plans.

UNISON attended Belfast's COP27 rally in November 2022, which called for a dismantling of our fossil fuel economy and a worker-led just transition.

Following the passage of the Climate Change Act 2022, UNISON has joined a new ICTU Climate working group. The group wrote to the permanent secretaries of the Executive Office and Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) to request an update on the establishment of the office of independent Climate Commissioner and Just Transition Commission, respectively.

UNISON responded to DAERA's consultation on climate change reporting by specified public bodies. We emphasised the need for public bodies, such as health and social care Trusts and the Education Authority, to provide adaptation and mitigation reports annually, to bring NI into alignment with Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland. UNISON also suggested that additional questions are added to DAERA's suggested reporting template, to gather information on existing policy and practice regarding sustainable and circular procurement and to assess whether (and how) public bodies work with trade unions on climate action.

UNISON also contributed to the Women's Policy Group joint response to the Department for the Economy's Circular Economy Strategy. We highlighted the need for a collectivist, rather than individualist,

approach to carbon reduction, as well as the need for new technologies to be developed in the interests of communities, rather than big business. We also emphasised the leading role that unions can play in embedding circular economy principles across sectors and supply chains. Departments are currently finalising their climate action plans, and these are expected to be open to consultation later in 2023.

As part of September's Green Week, members of the Green Network designed surveys to be issued to members in their branches. These surveys were designed to capture members' opinions and feelings about climate action, and to assess what workplaces are doing to tackle the impacts of climate change. Our activists plan to use the results to initiate discussions with their employers on the importance of green spaces, clear and accessible recycling schemes and more.

Members in Omagh & Fermanagh Health set up a two-day stall, displaying resources and information encouraging individual climate action, and giving away bamboo pens and air-purifying spider plants.

UNISON plans to continue growing our Green Network base of activists, pressing for quick and meaningful climate action at both employer and governmental levels and ensuring that every UNISON branch has an Environmental Officer in post.



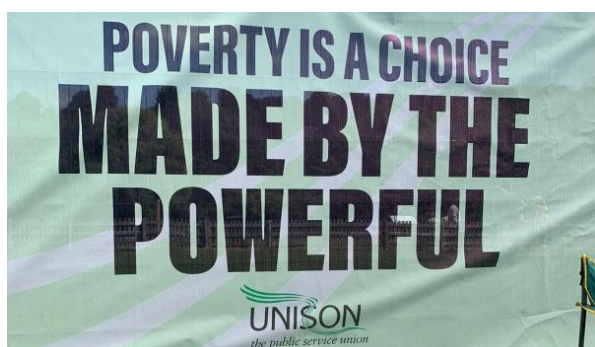
Low pay, poverty and targeting social need

■ Challenging poverty and welfare reform

UNISON plays a key role in the campaign to eradicate poverty and we continue to work with our allies including CAJ, the NI Anti-Poverty Network, and the Cliff Edge Coalition.

Cost of living crisis: The impact of the cost of living crisis is felt across our membership, particularly amongst the lowest paid. High levels of inflation and the high costs of essentials such as food, fuel and energy place our members and their families in an increasingly difficult position, with their pay not keeping pace to match.

This reality faced by our members informs all of our policy and campaigning work, including the work we do under the ICTU 'Workers Demand Better' campaign challenging for action to be taken on the cost of living crisis, and the responses we have made to the severe cuts in public spending that will disproportionately impact those living in poverty.



Anti-Poverty Strategy: The lack of an Anti-Poverty Strategy has coincided with an ongoing cost-of-living crisis and budget cuts to public services and the community and voluntary sector. This reinforces the need for a robust, rights-based Anti-Poverty Strategy based on objective need, with investment and clear actions that can lead to systemic change.

The Anti-Poverty Strategy should provide targeted support for those disproportionately affected by poverty, in order to promote equality of opportunity. The lived experiences of those in poverty, as well as the advocacy of trade unions and wider civic society, must be at the heart of the strategy's development and delivery.

As we reported last year, UNISON represented NIC-ICTU on the Co-Design Group established by the Minister for Communities to inform the development of an Executive Anti-Poverty strategy. In March 2021, the Minister published reports from four 'Expert Advisory Panels' to help inform the development of a series of new social inclusion strategies for NI, including an Anti-Poverty Strategy. The reports contain far reaching recommendations, which, if enacted, provide a blueprint to help transform NI into a more equal, rights-based society. We are striving to ensure that the recommendations are fully incorporated into the final strategies.

In relation to the development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy, we have emphasised the importance of:

- full implementation of the real Living Wage;
- increased collective bargaining coverage, and ending precarious work, including through banning zero-hours contracts;
- the introduction of measures on childcare and a new child payment; and
- maintaining and enhancing welfare mitigations and the supports available through the social security system.

Our UNISON 'Free School Meals for All' campaign is a further important intervention aimed at reducing poverty for our members and their families.

Whilst development of a draft Anti-Poverty Strategy remains ongoing, in the absence of an Executive it cannot proceed to be publicly consulted upon and adopted.

In order to keep it high on the agenda, UNISON worked with the Equality Coalition, NI Anti-Poverty Network and Barnardo's NI to organise a seminar held at Stormont in June on progressing an anti-poverty strategy. The event was sponsored by MLAs from across the political parties and brought together civil servants, members of the Anti-Poverty Strategy Expert Advisory Panel, academics, and civic society groups, to chart the progress of developing an Anti-Poverty Strategy for NI and consider next steps.



Our key calls were for the adoption and implementation of an overarching, comprehensive Anti-Poverty Strategy based on objective need to be a day one priority for a new Executive. The strategy should have clear, timebound targets and build upon the detailed work that has been carried out to date in order to ensure expedient delivery and implementation of actions.

In the interim, we called on the Department for Communities and all government departments to progress the development of the draft strategy as much as is possible in readiness for a new Executive. The seminar captured media attention and will assist in keeping the issue on the political agenda. Securing and implementing an effective Anti-Poverty strategy will remain an ongoing priority.

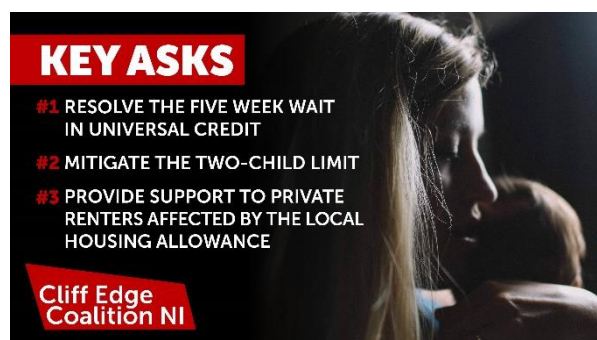
Cliff Edge Coalition: UNISON is a member of the Cliff Edge Coalition – a group of over 100 organisations from across NI which came together to campaign for the extension of welfare mitigations beyond March 2020. The Coalition’s campaign was successful and, in 2022, the NI Assembly legislated to indefinitely retain the mitigations for the bedroom tax; close the loopholes which had prevented claimants from accessing financial assistance through the mitigation scheme; and extend the benefit cap mitigations until 2025.

This year, we joined the Coalition steering group which sets strategic direction and campaigning priorities. Its 3 new asks are to:

- resolve the 5-week wait for Universal Credit;
- mitigate the two-child limit;
- provide support for private renters affected by the Local Housing Allowance.

A Cliff Edge relaunch event was held in Belfast on 3rd May 2023. The Coalition is challenging proposed cuts by the Department for Communities and NI Housing Executive, including changes to the Discretionary Support Scheme and Discretionary Housing Payments. The cumulative effects of these cuts will lead to chronic deprivation for households on the lowest incomes.

Impact of DfC Budget on social security and welfare mitigations: UNISON has highlighted that cuts to the DfC budget will lead to a lack of resource to fund new welfare mitigations or payments. A specific new welfare mitigation proposed by the Independent Panel of the Welfare Mitigations Review (2022), the Cliff Edge Coalition and the Children’s Social Care Services Review (2023) is to mitigate the 2-child limit. UNISON has consistently opposed the limit, a policy that disproportionately impacts women, the majority of primary carers for children in NI. Failure to introduce a policy to mitigate against the 2-child limit would therefore disproportionately harm women and negatively impact children across NI.



The Independent panel and the Coalition has also recommended:

- increasing the Universal Credit Contingency Fund budget for paying grants during the five-week wait;
- the introduction of new guidance to enable payments to be more readily made under the Fund;
- the introduction of a financial inclusion service to provide support to private renters affected by the Local Housing Allowance freeze.

The inability to fund new welfare mitigations or payments in this budget will, therefore, have major adverse impacts across a range of section 75 groups.

Unpaid carers: UNISON contributed to research conducted on behalf of the NI Carer Poverty Commission. This research will examine the scale and drivers of poverty among unpaid carers in NI and aims to identify new policy recommendations for the Stormont Assembly and Executive to help eradicate poverty wherever it exists.

Our evidence included that:

- care work – both paid and unpaid – is too often undervalued by those in positions of political power;
- paid carers' leave must be introduced and workers need greater control of working hours for those with caring responsibilities;
- while secure and well-paid employment; offers some protection against poverty, many people with caring responsibilities face in-work poverty – especially those who work part-time;
- employers and the government must do more to support workers who are unpaid carers.

Childcare: NI has no childcare strategy, despite 'New Decade, New Approach' commitments. As part of the Childcare for All Campaign we continue to push 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.

At the most recent meeting of the All Party Group for Early Education and Childcare, officials from the departments of Health and Education provided updates on the work on the Childcare Strategy. Costed options are still being finalised and it is planned that this work will be advanced to allow for engagement with elected representatives and with the Stakeholder Engagement forum. They stressed that the costed options are not being hampered by the current funding situation.



NI Anti-Poverty Network: Thomas Mahaffy, Head of Organising, represents UNISON on the Board of the NI Anti-Poverty Network. Following significant funding from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, Rebecca Bor has taken up post to rebuild and strengthen the Network and re-establish it as a critical voice for the anti-poverty sector in NI.

NIAPN is working collectively on many different events and campaigns through the Cliff Edge Coalition, the Equality Coalition, the Women's Policy Group and the Fuel Poverty Coalition. NIAPN was also a co-host of the previously mention Anti-Poverty Strategy held in Stormont on 28th June.



NIAPN has launched a website to provide space for member organizations to write short pieces that highlight the work, campaigns or initiatives that they are spearheading. It has also rebuilt relationships with other anti-poverty organizations and networks across these islands and in Europe including the European Anti-Poverty Network- Ireland, the European Anti-Poverty Network - Brussels, the Anti-Poverty Alliance in Scotland and the End Child Poverty Coalition in the UK.

In these challenging times it has never been more important to have an organisation such as NIAPN to challenge the policies that are causing such stress to the growing numbers experiencing poverty.

■ Housing

We contributed to 'Through the roof: housing and the cost-of-living crisis for public service workers', UNISON's national report on housing affordability. We highlighted the specific affordability issues facing private and social housing tenants in NI.

Although NI is often considered an area of more affordable housing compared to most of GB, our median annual earnings are consistently lower. This context is important for understanding the answers of survey respondents from NI - a majority of whom reported spending 40% or more on housing costs. This is unaffordable housing by almost any measure. We also highlighted the fact that, at the time of writing, average private rent in NI grew by 9.8% in the year to February 2023 – higher than in any other UK region.

The report found that housing costs have increased for almost two thirds of public service workers, with those in the private rented sector paying the most. High housing costs mean that many workers are living too far from their place of work; 32% of respondents said the cost of housing is forcing them to look elsewhere to live and work. Almost 60% are spending less on food and essentials and around 25% are using credit cards to pay household bills.

The report recommends that Government must

- invest to increase the supply of all types of housing, especially social housing;

- prioritise making existing and new homes accessible and affordable to public service key workers;
- end the use of 'affordable rent' schemes, whereby rents are set at 80% of market rates, and establish a new definition of affordable housing linked to real incomes;
- end Right to Buy schemes, including the Right to Buy for NI Housing Executive tenants, in order to protect our stock of social housing;
- legislate to regulate the private rented sector to improve security of tenure and standards;
- legislate to introduce rent controls;
- reform the welfare system by raising Local Housing Allowance, restoring the £20 Universal Credit uplift and ending the five-week wait for Universal Credit;
- give public service workers a pay rise, at least in line with inflation, and take action to increase minimum and living wages.



■ Working with the community & voluntary sector

In order to take forward the sense of a motion remitted by Derry Trades Council at the 2022 ICTU Northern conference, UNISON proposed at the NIC that the relevant unions bring together reps across the C&V sector to develop action plans to challenge the critical impact of budget cuts.

The past 12 months have seen widespread concern across the sector at the loss of both European Social Fund (ESF) funding and the ongoing budget cuts to Executive

Departments, who fund many programmes delivered by our members within the sector. We have been particularly mindful of the impact on our members within the sector when responding to the consultations on cuts as part of our policy work and dealing with the impact as part of our bargaining work.

Loss of ESF funding: April 2023 saw the ending of ESF funded services and projects. These projects had a significant impact in addressing social exclusion, poverty and

deprivation across NI, assisting young people, women, the long-term unemployed, persons with disabilities and ethnic minority communities. The new UK Shared Prosperity Fund is intended to act as a successor to EU funds, but there has been widespread concern across the sector at the level of funding available and the administration and delivery of the fund in NI.

UNISON engaged across employers in advance of April 2023 as to the impact that the loss of ESF funding would have on our members jobs and the delivery of services, if the necessary replacement funding was not secured. We wrote to the Secretary of State for NI on the issue, and the Regional Secretary formed part of an ICTU delegation that met with the Minister of State, Steve Baker MP, to challenge the NIO directly on the impacts of the loss of this funding and to call for adequate replacement funding. While some funding was eventually made available, many of the organisations have either not received the same level of funding or have failed to receive any.

Our campaign of opposing 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. Our campaigning has focused on the chronic underfunding of the programme and adverse impact this has on our members. We have called for any additional funding or new procurement model to be translated into better pay and terms and conditions for workers on par with NHS workers on Agenda for Change carrying out the same/similar roles.

In opposing the budget cuts being placed on the Department for Communities, which funds the programme, we focused particular attention on the impact on Supporting People. The budget provides no uplift for the programme for 2023 – 24, leaving the services and our members jobs vulnerable.

Core grant funding: The cuts to the Department of Health budget include a £1.0m reduction in the Departmental Core Grants Scheme. We share the concerns expressed by community and voluntary organisations as to the impact that a reduction in the Core Grants Scheme will have across the sector. We understand that organisations are already being advised that their core grant funding will end and that they are concerned that the Department is underestimating the impact that this loss of funding will have.



Our response: In response to the current crisis, UNISON recently met with the Equality Commission (ECNI) and called on them to use their enforcement powers to legally challenge proposed cuts which will clearly impact on those services designed to promote equality for women, people with disabilities, the LGBT+ community, children and young people, older people, and will have a disproportionate impact on the basis of community background. We believe the ECNI has powers to challenge the UK Government and must now act.

On the campaign front, UNISON and the other relevant trade unions now need to act in coalition with the affected organisations themselves to exert political pressure, organise public opinion and where necessary take industrial action. This requires a strategic organising initiative with bargaining and campaign support.

UNISON campaigns in health and education

■ Health and social services campaigns

At Regional Council 2023, we debated a motion on initiating a major campaign calling for the development of a public health model to deal with issues such as safe staffing, health inequalities and privatisation. Our policy, campaigns and bargaining activity across the last 12 months has sought to progress these objectives. Through our policy and campaigns work we have further sought to support the ongoing industrial action being taken by our members across health and social services, which aims not only to secure decent pay for the workforce, but to retain the workers our health services need.

The past 12 months have seen significant and disturbing developments in both the Department of Health and across the HSC Trusts regarding the planning and delivery of services, alongside significant planned budget cuts. While we continue to engage with senior officials to articulate the concerns of our members and seek that any proposed reforms to the delivery of services improves the situation for patients, service users, the public and our members, the truth is that our services are in radical decline. It will take an organised public response to exert pressure. It is increasingly the case that our members currently engaged in industrial action are doing so not solely for pay justice but also because of the impact on services.

Transformation oversight structures: One way to confuse us all while pushing through cuts and so-called reorganisation is to create more and more 'structures' and 'bodies'. We are wise to this strategy. In October 2022, the Department held the first meeting of the newly-established Improvement and Transformation Advisory Board (ITAB), replacing the previous Transformation Advisory Board (TAB). UNISON represents ICTU on this new structure and has challenged the process by which ITAB has been created and its terms of reference. We are reserving our position with regards to our ongoing participation.

In an attempt to further confuse, ITAB sits alongside a Health and Social Care Performance and Transformation Executive Board, which itself replaces the previous Management Board for Rebuilding HSC Services. We have expressed concern as to the lack of consultation that occurred in creating these new structures. This increasingly looks like a case of 'when the cat's away the mice will play'. In the absence of Government, officials are attempting to implement changes without the engagement of workers and public, or the resources required.



Cuts to health and social care budgets: In May, the Department published an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) in relation to the £732 million funding gap it faces as a result of the budget set by the Secretary of State. The Department suggested that £260 million of savings could be made with 'low and medium' impacts across the system. We questioned this analysis and have demanded information and engagement on the impact of these measures across services and the impact of the lack of investment in any 'service transformation'.

A major concern arising from the cuts to health funding relates to the loss of 300 additional nursing and midwifery undergraduate training places, which had been funded since 2020 as part of the 'New Decade, New Approach' agreement. Nursing and midwifery vacancies represent the single highest number of vacancies across services and the loss of training places impacts on the ability to fill these roles.

For one year, the Irish Government is funding places at NI universities, with places split between students from the Republic of Ireland and NI.

The EQIA held out the prospect that further cuts may be made in-year across areas, such as a restriction in domiciliary care packages. However the Department is not proceeding with these at present in the absence of Ministerial authority. Given the breadth of cuts proposed and the impact that they will have across services and on the workforce, we challenged the lack of mitigating measures and alternative policies proposed by the Department here.

Safe Staffing legislation: We continue to work to progress the development of safe staffing legislation, further to the commitments made by the Minister for Health in the 2020 Framework Agreement that led to the suspension of our industrial action.

Whilst progress in developing legislative proposals for public consultation has been slower than we would have wished, we anticipate that the Department will share a draft consultation document with us shortly for comment, before proceeding to full public consultation. We have continued to emphasise that the legislation should set clear duties in relation to workforce planning and investment and ensure clear reporting and accountability mechanisms.

Reform of Adult Social Care: In 2022 UNISON responded to the DoH consultation on adult social care – a follow up to the Power to People report. In our submission, we reiterated our demand for reform including that the Social Care Fair Work Forum play a major role in the reform process, particularly by introducing decent pay, terms and conditions.



Unsurprisingly, the Department subsequently established yet another structure - the Social Care Collaborative Forum - involving private care providers, HSC Trusts, Departmental officials, service users, and carers representatives to take forward reform. Through ICTU we have secured trade union representation on this body (with UNISON currently holding this seat) and continue to seek further trade union seats.

In December 2022, the Department of Health made the decision to temporarily pause the Fair Work Forum. We challenged this decision and have urged the Department to recommence its work. The latest proposal from the Department is that a workshop for the Fair Work Forum will be held this autumn to agree a way forward and consider how the Fair Work Forum will interact with the Collaborative Forum. And so it goes on...

Proposed closure of Muckamore Abbey Hospital: In January, UNISON responded to the consultation on the proposed closure of Muckamore Abbey Hospital. In our response, we called for confirmation that a range of appropriate alternative arrangements and adequate supports are available for persons with learning disabilities within the community.



We highlighted that the resettlement of patients into appropriate community facilities and support should be undertaken as swiftly as possible, but that in order to ensure this happens, there must be the necessary, sustained investment in community-based services and treatment pathways, including necessary investment in the HSC workforce needed to deliver these services.

Betrayal of Trust: The following changes to healthcare delivery across various Trusts has been posed as temporary, with recruitment and retention problems being cited as the main cause. In each case a public consultation was launched and UNISON, the workforce, the public and local politicians challenged the proposals. In each case, all of this opposition has been ignored pointing to the fact that we need to launch a health emergency campaign across NI.

Southern HSC Trust Emergency General Surgery: In 2023 the Southern HSC Trust launched a public consultation on plans to make the temporary one site model for the provision of Emergency General Surgery from Craigavon Area Hospital permanent. UNISON has opposed this at every step including organising and participating in a number of public events and rallies. Through the public consultation we raised our concerns about the lack of transparency throughout the process, the lack of official trade union involvement and the repeated failure of the Trust to address the serious recruitment deficit in Daisy Hill Hospital.



We also asked for details on the proposed Elective Overnight Stay Centre as well as detail on what assessment the Trust has completed of the impact this change has had on Craigavon Area Hospital and its ability to manage the proposed permanent change. We continue to work with branches in the Southern Trust area supporting the ongoing campaign to protect services at Daisy Hill Hospital.

South West Acute Hospital Emergency General Surgery:

In December 2022, the Western HSC Trust paused all Emergency General Surgery in the South West Acute Hospital (SWAH) and put contingency plans in place to provide this service at Altnagelvin Hospital, Craigavon Area Hospital and Sligo General Hospital. We emphasised the need for full engagement with Trade Unions and highlighted our concerns at the impact this suspension would have on the hospital's Acute Hospital status. We asked the Trust for their plans to ensure other "at risk" services will not face similar suspensions and how they will address recruitment difficulties going forward. We continue to work with our branches to address the ongoing issues at SWAH.



Causeway maternity services: In July 2023 the Northern HSC Trust ceased the provision of labour and delivery services in the Causeway Hospital, with services being provided solely in Antrim Area Hospital. We challenged this decision, supported our members, and worked with the local community and politicians. UNISON held a public meeting in Coleraine in May where members of the public voiced their concerns about the safety of rural communities and the impact this will have on the wider hospital community.

Southern Trust dementia services: In May 2022, the Southern HSC Trust temporarily relocated the provision of inpatient dementia services from St Luke's Hospital, Armagh to Craigavon Area Hospital. The Trust launched a public consultation, proposing this as a permanent change in October 2022. We raised the serious concerns of our members about the loss of patient treatment and facilities in the relocation. We shared concerns about the wellbeing of our members and our concerns that the review of inpatient dementia services will not address the issues of recruitment within the service. We raised concerns and asked for clarity on how the relocation would meet the needs of a rising population with dementia in the Southern Trust.

Ards and North Down Minor Injuries Unit: In May 2023 we responded to the South Eastern HSC Trust consultation proposing the closure of the Minor Injuries Unit at Ards Community Hospital and the permanent relocation of the service to the Ulster Hospital as an urgent care centre, co-located

alongside the Accident and Emergency services there. We raised a number of issues on behalf of our members in this response, including the ability of the Ulster Hospital to deal with an increasing number of patients attending the site, staffing levels and redeployment, investment in an urgent care centre, and accessibility for patients in rural areas. In August, the Trust announced that the Permanent Secretary had approved their proposals.



■ Education campaigns

In the absence of Government we continue to engage with the Department and the Education Authority on our priority policy and campaigns issues. Regional Council has set the following framework for our interventions. Our education system must:

- deliver to disadvantaged areas, is non-selective, and promotes equality;
- challenge disadvantage and support improvement by taking forward a new approach to the funding formula that not only restores recent cuts, but targets objective need and inequality;
- provide free, nutritional meals for all pupils;
- protects and strengthen the work of classroom, nursery and special needs staff;
- protect cleaning, catering and schools-based staff against the threat of privatisation;
- ensure that all staff in schools are employed on fair contracts;

- stop any plans to curtail Special Educational Needs services for pre-school children;
- ensure that future area planning processes consider workforce issues.

Funding crisis in education: Education services, particularly those programmes aimed at improving outcomes for children and young people living in poverty and disadvantage, have been hit particularly hard by the cuts imposed through the budget set by the Secretary of State.



In March, the Department announced that it would cease funding a range of programmes, including the School Holiday Food Grant scheme (referred to as ‘holiday hunger’ payments) provided to families with children in receipt of free school meals to support them outside of term time. UNISON spoke out against these cuts publicly, particularly given our longstanding campaign for universal free school meals. We joined with wider civic society organisations in an open letter to the Secretary of State calling for him to find the resources necessary to maintain the payments.

We responded to the EQIA pointing out that it failed to meet requirements. We called for cuts to the Holiday Hunger Scheme to be reversed immediately and for the Department to consider ringfencing funds to ensure that targeted funding for those most vulnerable children continue to be directed at the vital programmes that help to tackle poverty and educational underachievement.

DE Corporate Plan: In November 2022, UNISON responded to the Department’s consultation on its 5 year Corporate Plan (2023-2028). In this response, we highlighted the impact of austerity across education services, our campaign for universal free school meals, the need for delivery of a childcare strategy, and that the Department needed to progress initiatives to decarbonise education services.

Free School Meals for All: Our Free School Meals Campaign continues despite all obstacles. We are demanding universal free school meal provision for all children and young people.



The campaign objectives are:

- to seek universal, nutritious, free schools 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 should be publicly provided;
- to build support for the implementation of a public health model across Government that is aimed at dealing with health and educational inequalities.

As a result of our campaigning, the previous Education Minister initiated a review of free school meals and uniform grant eligibility criteria, with the option of providing universal free school meals to all or certain year groups to be considered.

We engaged with the review pressing the Department to move towards a universal approach. We had understood that there would be a public consultation exercise early in 2023, with options that would have allowed more children and young people access to free school meals, if additional resource from outside the Department’s budget was allocated. We had planned a range of campaign activities to coincide with the public consultation phase to maximise responses supporting a universal approach, and to ensure that our members and their families had the opportunity to have their voices heard.

However, the public consultation did not commence as expected and we have subsequently been informed that the Permanent Secretary has deferred the launch citing severe budgetary constraints. The campaign continues.

Period Products: Following the passing of the Period Products (Free Provision) Act (NI) the Department of Education consulted on its regulations regarding their duty to provide products. In our response, UNISON highlighted the importance of ensuring that products were easily available to all building users who may need to access period products, as well as the importance of ensuring a variety of products are available with a mind to allowing choice while also providing sustainable options where possible.

Preventing Violence in the Workplace Policy:

UNISON responded to the Education Authority's Preventing Violence in the Workplace Policy in February 2023. We raised our concerns that the policy did not make provision for people experiencing domestic violence. We also expressed the view that the policy must reflect the diverse nature of the workforce and pay particular attention to preventing violence based on racism, misogyny, and discrimination against disabled and LGBT+ people.

Relationship and Sexuality Education: The Department of Education has recently launched a consultation on the regulations in respect of the parental right to have a child excused from receiving age-appropriate, comprehensive, and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive rights. We are working with a range of organisations to collectively respond to this consultation and ensure maximum response from members of the public.



Common Funding Formula: We continue to press for a different approach to the funding formula for schools that will both restore recent cuts, as well as targeting objective need and the inequality of outcomes. It is our

position that the role of classroom, nursery and special needs staff must also be protected and strengthened.

The funding of education is complex, as are the governance arrangements. For this reason, we are summarising 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.



The UNISON-led partnership projects

This Partnership Programme is led by Thomas Mahaffy on behalf of Regional Committee and is supported by relevant branch and staff members for each project.

Following the death of Pamela Dooley, our former Head of Organising and Union / employer partnership advisor, the Programme is under review. Pamela was the driving force behind the delivery of the bespoke partnership training programme for managers and union activists, as well as the direct member engagement that has been crucial to the success of these projects over 25 years. The review will assess the future development and scope of the two current partnership projects with NIAS and the Northern Trust; as well as the potential for future collaborative work with other HSC Trusts.

NI Ambulance Service: Discussions are taking place with NIAS on the future development of the Project, including the role of the joint UNISON/NIAS Health & Wellbeing Steering Group. Ongoing UNISON priorities include:

- maximising staff engagement, participation, relationships and communications;
- supporting culture change, including leadership training and skills development;
- promoting equality and the empowerment of women workers; and
- developing targeted health, wellbeing and mental health initiatives.

Northern HSC Trust: Our project with the Northern HSC Trust is currently being evaluated following significant activity over 6 years to improve communications and information sharing; team working, recognition and respect within and across staff groups; and health and wellbeing.

Outstanding issues identified for potential future work include:

- action to support staff with childcare and those requesting homeworking;
- increasing access to health & wellbeing support;
- ensuring proper induction and H&S training for all new staff;
- ensuring that staff and managers have sufficient training to be confident and competent in their roles;
- ensure that there are clear H&S policies and protocols in place and that they are properly enforced.

Discussions will take place with branches to determine future issues and workplaces where collaborative work between UNISON and management can deliver 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.



Equality and human rights

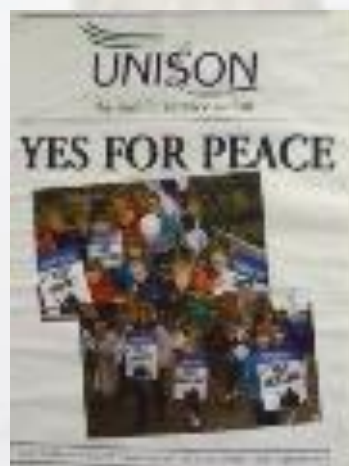
The Good Friday Agreement contained extensive commitments on equality and human rights. These permeated all 3 strands of the Agreement and the codes and operation of devolved Government. These commitments were central to UNISON support in the 1998 referendum.

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 contained 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.

There is now little doubt that many of the key commitments in the Peace Agreement have been betrayed. The people have suffered 13 years of austerity, the absence of Government and punitive action by the UK Government.

Our equality laws are woefully out of date. There are no real enforcement strategies, and many of the positive action schemes, mostly community based, are under threat. Despite this, our members have consistently reaffirmed support for the Peace Agreement and, in particular, the equality and human rights aspects which our public services play a key role in delivering.



UNISON NI's influential 'Yes for Peace' leaflet was produced in 1998 in support of the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent Referendum.

Supporting our allies: UNISON continues to make a major contribution to the debate on equality and human rights. 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 NI; the Women's Policy Group and Women's Budgeting Group; and the Participation and Practice of Rights in particular, and report on key developments below.

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.



■ The Equality Coalition - Demanding an equality and right-based framework

The Equality Coalition is co-convened by UNISON and CAJ and has over 100 member organisations, with its membership continuing to grow further year on year. A number of these members 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 and no other overarching consistent ‘critical friend’ of the equality oversight bodies, public authorities, and local government. A key part of the Coalition’s work centres on encouraging application of the Section 75 equality duties and engaging regularly with the Equality Commission for NI (ECNI). The work of the Coalition is supported by the UNISON Campaign Fund.

The last twelve months have been an extremely busy time for the Coalition as we have adjusted to the collapse of power sharing in 2022 and have organised events on some of the key equality issues impacting NI. We continue to hold regular meetings with our members where we discuss how best to advance the equality agenda in NI, in addition to offering our members capacity building training sessions. The last training session held by the Coalition focused on engagement with the UK Parliament and NI Executive, while the next (scheduled for November 2023) will look at digital best practice for activist organisations. We also regularly provide training to other groups on Section 75.

A new case study has been developed on the Equality Coalition by CAJ and the Transitional Justice Institute (TJI) for the LSE Gender, Justice and Security Hub. This will be published shortly.

Protecting economic, social and workers’ rights in NI during the cost of living crisis: In the context of the cost of living crisis, we have continued to campaign for an anti-poverty strategy for NI, which is now almost twenty years overdue. Arising from the 2006 St Andrews Agreement legislation, the NI Executive has a legal duty to adopt a binding

anti-poverty strategy on the basis of objective need. In June 2023, we organised a joint event at Stormont with Barnardo’s NI, and NI Anti-Poverty Network (NIAPN) to call for the strategy to be a day one priority for the next NI Executive. The half day seminar on ‘Progressing an anti-poverty strategy for NI’ was sponsored by five political parties and received widespread media coverage. A report from this seminar is currently under development and will be used as a tool to lobby further on this issue.



With our members, we have scrutinised the 2023 budget cuts and examined how the equality duty has been exercised in relation to the setting of departmental budgets. More broadly, we have continued to encourage the effective application of the public sector equality duty (Section 75) in public policy decisions at all levels.

Another ongoing focus for the Coalition has been protecting workers’ rights following Brexit, including those of migrant workers through frequent collaboration with our members who support migrants and refugees in NI.

GFA@25: Campaigning for the protection and implementation of the rights and equality provisions for the peace settlement: Our work in this area remains focused on our ‘Policy Asks’ document and ‘Manifesto for a Rights Based Return to Power Sharing’, both of which were produced in collaboration with our members. The potential timeline for the restoration of power sharing in NI remains unclear, but we will aim to actively engage with the leading political parties if and when negotiations are held (as we did last time in the run up to the development of the New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) agreement).

In April 2023, we joined with many others in marking the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), including by staging an event on the ongoing 'chill factor' in NI (see further below). The Equality Coalition was also invited to attend the 'official' celebrations at Queen's University Belfast, as were a number of our members, although the overall representation of civil society across the various events was unfortunately poor.

Throughout the last twelve months, we have continued to engage with ECNI and NI Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) to ensure the protection of workers' rights, and broader rights, through the effective implementation of post-Brexit safeguards, including the new dedicated mechanisms. Most recently, the Equality Coalition took part in a panel discussion on the dedicated mechanisms in July 2023.

Countering hate crime, intimidation and hate expression: The Coalition has conducted a substantial amount of work in recent years on hate crime and hate expression - including examining how misogyny can best be protected against under NI law. In December 2022, we held a seminar in Stormont to specifically look at how the new Scottish model for tackling misogyny through criminal law could be applied in the NI context, which was attended by the then Justice Minister, Naomi Long MLA. Our keynote speaker was Baroness Helena Kennedy KC, who led the working group responsible for the development of the Scottish model.

■ Conflict and dealing with the past

Despite opposition from all sections of NI society, including all political parties, victims and survivors, the trade union movement, civil society in general and the international human rights bodies, the UK Government moved ahead with its controversial NI Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill.

UNISON has been lobbying for a commitment from the Labour Party for the repeal of this legislation by a future Labour Government. This legislation is one of the most telling signs

In March 2023, the Equality Coalition held a roundtable discussion with our members on the 'chill factor' still experienced by activists and academics in NI, 25 years after the signing of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement. This intimidation takes many forms, including paramilitary threats and online abuse. The event was conducted under the Chatham House Rule to ensure everyone could speak openly. Following the session, CAJ produced a special edition of its newsletter, Just News, to further stimulate discussions on this important issue.



The Coalition has also continued to press for policy reform to deal with the NI specific issues of paramilitary involvement in housing intimidation, as well as racist, sectarian, and homophobic (etc) hate expression in public spaces. Recently, the Coalition was represented at the inaugural meeting of the new Disability Sub-Group set up by the Hate Crime Advocacy Service. The Coalition plans to continue to engage with the sub-group going forwards.

that NI is regarded as of little or no consequence by the current UK Government. UNISON has consistently argued when moving motions on this issue at both ICTU and NDC conferences, that at a time when political agreement is being sought to restore devolved government, it is nothing short of remarkable that the one issue on which there has been total political agreement has been completely ignored. We will continue to call for repeal.

Bill of Rights and Human Rights Consortium

UNISON is represented on the Human Rights Consortium (HRC) Board by Thomas Mahaffy, Head of Organising & Development. The HRC is a broad alliance of over 170 civil society organisations from across all communities, sectors and areas of NI. Additional background information on many of the issues raised in this report have been addressed in previous sections.



EU Engagement: On 21 October 2022 the HRC facilitated a fact-finding mission to Belfast by the EU-UK Follow-up Committee - a working body of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) that was assessing the implementation of the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement. The HRC facilitated access to the Committee for a wide range of groups, including trade unions. The EESC formally adopted a report reflecting a wide range of key NI civil society concerns that were significant in shaping EU approaches to the (revised) NI/Ireland Protocol negotiations.

The HRC was appointed a member of the UK Civil Society Forum established under the EU/UK Trade and Co-operation Agreement, and at the first Forum meeting in October 2022 raised concerns about the UK Government's commitment to the Human Rights Act and the level playing field commitments, and their relevance to the Trade & Co-operation Agreement. HRC hosted a further EEC delegation in June 2023.

UK wide collaboration: In November 2022, alongside colleagues in the Human Rights Consortium Scotland, the Wales Civil Society Forum and the Civil Society Alliance, the Consortium hosted a two day, UK-wide civil society conference. Discussions included the ongoing challenges in developing human rights standards and other forms of protection across the UK.

In June the HRC convened an online conference entitled Lessons from Scotland and Wales: Incorporating international human rights standards in NI. In responses to the UK Governments attempts to undermine the Human Rights Act and ECHR, the Consortium also continued to act as the NI representative on the steering group for the UK wide Save Our Human Rights Act coalition. The Consortium has also been an important ally in convening UK wide support in challenging the Illegal Migration Act and in highlighting the unfulfilled human rights commitments of the Good Friday Agreement.

The HRC is the host employer and Project Advisory Group member for the Civil Society Alliance which was set up following the UK's exit from the EU to help civil society across the UK to navigate the complicated legal and constitutional landscape of a post-Brexit UK. The Alliance has been a particularly strong ally and source of advocacy around the NI Protocol Bill and Retained EU Law Act.



Human Rights Festival: In December 2022, the Consortium coordinated a programme of online and in-person events for our annual Human Rights Festival, with over 20 organisations hosting 26 screenings, workshops, seminars and cultural events on various human rights themes.

International Standards: The HRC developed detailed awareness raising and research activities for the UK's review under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), to enable member organisations to contribute to the review and ensure NI specific human rights issues were heard as part of that process.

This included convening an ad-hoc ICESCR working group which developed a wide-ranging and diverse shadow report for the Pre-Sessional Working Group and making a joint presentation to the Troika of the Pre-Sessional Working Group in March 2023. Following these interventions, a substantive number of the civil society concerns were officially raised by the UN with the UK.

Following HRC lobbying prior to the in-person review of the UK's Universal Periodic Review by member states at the United Nation in October 2022, 13 states had raised specific concerns/recommendations about the UK's direction of travel with regard to the Human Rights Act and ECHR.

NIHRC working groups: *Brexit and Human Rights Working Group* activity included lobbying and policy development on the Retained EU Law Bill (now Act), the ill-fated NI Protocol Bill and the newly developed Windsor Framework. This included a developing a submission to House of Lords inquiry on the impact of the Protocol, a second reading briefing for MPs and Lords on the Retained EU Law Bill, and a joint BHRWG 5 Tests for the Protocol deal. The HRC are currently developing an updated briefing on the current state-of-play for various rights-related issues around the Framework.

The Bill of Rights Working Group developed a Bill of Rights public letter signed by over 60 organisations. On the 25th anniversary of the GFA it also mobilised 100+ NI civil society organisations in support of the Make our future fair campaign to deliver a Bill of Rights.

The *Human Rights Act working group* resisted the Bill of Rights Bill until its eventual shelving this year. However, there was a recognition that attacks on the HRA would continue in a more targeted fashion, and the group pivoted to focus on an emerging threat to the Act - the Illegal Migration Bill. In collaboration with PILS, we conducted a targeted expansion of the Working Group to include more organisations working in the refugee & asylum seekers support sector and developed a joint briefing on the specific impacts of the Bill in NI. In launching this report, the HRC brought together policy analysis with direct lived experience and made the event available online afterwards.

The HRC further worked with this group to develop targeted lobbying strategies in the Lords to ensure that issues pertaining to NI, including our devolved anti-trafficking legislation, impact on the land border and the Windsor Framework were raised in the Lords, while developing and supporting scoping amendments from Lords raising these issues.

■ Participation and the Practice of Rights

UNISON continues to work in partnership with Participation and Practice of Rights (PPR) which was founded by former UNISON Regional Secretary, the late Inez McCormack. PPR puts human rights tools at the service of marginalised communities. UNISON's Head of Organising & Development, Thomas Mahaffy, represents UNISON on PPR's Management Committee and UNISON continue to support organising and training initiatives with the PPR team across issues of housing, climate action, mental health and migration.

Housing: The official housing waiting list for NI has now reached more than 45,000 households. In Belfast alone the housing waiting list for March 2023 totalled 12,175

households. Over 5,000 children in Belfast are now officially homeless. Many of these families are UNISON members who will never have a stable home unless we build homes now on available land.



The **Take Back the City** campaign, led by families in housing need, is pioneering a new approach. They have recruited a coalition of international experts to deliver plans for hundreds of units of sustainable social homes on the former Mackie's site in West Belfast - the biggest piece of publicly owned land in the city, located in the area of highest housing need.

Last year, Take Back The City launched a major international urban planning competition. The winner, Matthew Lloyd Architects London, was selected by a panel of homeless families, planning, development and tech experts. The plan is now being developed into a first of its kind planning application to be submitted to Belfast City Council.

The Council's recently approved Local Development Plan presents an opportunity for elected representatives to demonstrate support for people who need homes by rezoning the land at Mackie's. Take action in support of the Take Back The City Campaign - www.takebackthecity.ie/take-action/rezone-mackies



Mental Health: More people have died by suicide since the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 than were killed during the previous 25 years of conflict. Our current approach to supporting mental health is failing UNISON members.

In February 2023, mental health campaigners and activists launched the #NewScript for Mental Health campaign with 150 people and organisations who are frustrated by the current mental health model.

Guest speakers included the award winning author of 'Trespases' Louise Kennedy, author and restorative justice practitioner Michael Patrick MacDonald and performance poet, Cathy Carson. The campaign brings together people experiencing emotional distress, practitioners and others who are interested in transforming our approach to mental health to one which is rooted in connection, compassion, community and choice.

Power Threat Meaning Framework (Johnstone & Bayly, 2018)



Contact PPR's mental health campaign organiser Sara Boyce at sara@pprproject.org for further details - www.nlb.ie/campaigns/mental-health

Immigration: The war in Ukraine has again thrown into sharp focus the need for a local humanitarian response to a global refugee crisis. Conflict and climate collapse are forcing millions of people to leave their homes to seek safety.

Yet, Westminster's hostile immigration system is criminalising people who are seeking safety while generating enormous profits for the landlords and hotel owners who benefit from the current system. Far right groups are mobilising ever more brazen anti-immigration protests and race hate crime and violent attacks on ethnic minorities is sadly on the rise in many areas.

Locally, asylum seekers, who are banned from working to support themselves have organised the #KindEconomy initiative with UNISON's support. Over 130 local community groups and small businesses have teamed up with skilled asylum seekers to deliver goods, services and educational opportunities in spite of the oppressive conditions.

UNISON has provided the space for the development of the Kind Economy Chefs and the Kind Economy Education initiative. Chefs who are banned from working have been using UNISON facilities to develop international cuisine and support the local hospitality industry; retired teachers have teamed up with those who are banned from working to provide free education to asylum seeking children who do not have places in our education system.

In September 2023 Children's author Oliver Jeffers showed his support for children and young people living in contingency accommodation by developing 'SEEN' - an exhibition of their combined artwork which went on display in Stormont.

Kind Economy human rights defenders who are living in contingency accommodation have been documenting conditions and lived experiences inside the immigration system to inform a series of reports for local authorities, elected representatives and the media.

In response to rising racist violence Kind Economy campaigners have organised a series of public initiatives of solidarity and a call to action for the NI Executive to analyse all available data on racist violence and develop a coordinated and effective response. Get involved in the Kind Economy initiative - www.nlb.ie/take-action/lift-the-ban-kind-economy

Climate action and the cost of living crisis:
PPR are working with marginalised

communities to organise spaces where they can grow their own food and help respond to climate change with rewilding efforts.

UNISON members have been taking part in these initiatives at community gardens in Belfast through workshops organised by UNISON College NI. If you would like to get involved, learn new skills and help develop sustainable communities contact info@pprproject.org or the UNISON College.

Replicating PPRs human rights based approach – We continue to support community campaigns led by Travellers and people living in poor housing conditions in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Kerry. In Scotland, we are working with **Making Rights Real** – a new organisation set up to work with marginalised communities across Scotland, which is supported by Annie McCormack, Inez' daughter and Chair of Broke Not Broken.



In this, the tenth anniversary year of Inez McCormack's death, it was fitting that Annie teamed up with Making Rights Real and human rights activists from across Scotland to develop and host a production of *Seven*, the internationally renowned play which features Inez.

Speaking at the *Seven* Scotland event, Annie revealed that before Inez died she told her to make sure everybody understood the value of being "effectively annoying", and that mission is what drives her each day. Hear hear! See www.makingrightsreal.org.uk/

■ Migrant Centre NI (MCNI)

Established in 2012, the aim of the Migrant Centre NI (MCNI) is to tackle racism and eliminate barriers against new and settled migrant communities in NI. MCNI was Chaired by UNISON's Pamela Dooley until her death in April 2023. We are also represented on the Board by Local Organiser, Nathalie Donnelly. The staff and board of Migrant Centre NI have expressed their gratitude to both Pamela and Nathalie for all the time, effort, and support which they and UNISON have provided.



Migrant Centre NI has continued to deliver projects and services over the year and has secured core costs and continuation funding for a number of advice, advocacy and support projects.

Financial health and wellbeing advice and outreach project: This project addresses issues of debt, poverty, and financial health by providing a culturally sensitive service and improving the awareness of service users of their economic and financial rights.

It also improves access to financial support and services in a variety of languages to ensure migrants and their families do not face financial instability leading to mental health and wellbeing issues. Services are delivered face to face via appointments and drop-in clinics from the Lurgan and Belfast offices.

During the year, advisers provided advice services to individuals presenting with a wide range of issues, such as loss of employment; recent mental or physical illness diagnoses causing them to cease work; as well as problems accessing public services and employment due to EUSS scheme delays in decisions.

Advisers have aimed to ensure that clients struggling with health issues claim all the benefits they are entitled to, including in-work benefits and sickness benefits in cases of illness during their treatment.

Staff have assisted clients in understanding the additional measures provided by government addressing the cost-of-living crisis, and those struggling with on-line banking services and insurance issues. They have also made referrals for individuals requiring formal debt and pension advice. An increasing number of individuals are contacting the service with no recourse to public funds due to immigration status and staff have limited options to support these individuals other than refer them to church-based support and food banks.

Hate crime advocacy service: Funded by the PSNI and the DoJ, this service is now under a new 3 year partnership project led by Victim Support NI. Its goal is to provide comprehensive and practical support to victims of hate crime across the currently protected characteristics of race, disability, homophobia and transphobia. It provides:

- support / advice with PSNI;
- community engagement & re-housing referrals;
- referrals to specialist services and support groups including NIHE, GP / mental health counselling, Labour Relations Agency, Housing Rights, CRJI / NI Alternatives.

There were a total of 969 referrals into the service during 2023, with 46% of all referrals relating to racially motivated hate crime.

Migration justice project: Funded by Justice Together, this project works to advocate on behalf of migration justice issues and the detrimental impacts for those subject to immigration control and the hostile environment. The foundation of the project is the lived experience of the clients and users of Migrant Centre NI services with advisers and advocates ensuring that this project is reflecting the key issue effecting the communities. The project staff hold

regular case review meetings with advisers identifying themes which can be raised at policy and legislative level and advocating on behalf of individual cases. Themes over the year have focused on health charging, access to benefits entitlements, PSNI immigration reporting, violence against women and girls, housing and NRPF.

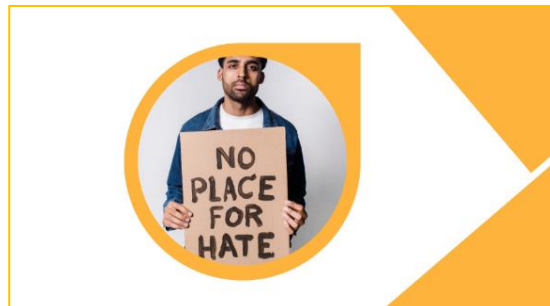
The project worker is a member of the Women's Policy Group, and on behalf of the group and the Human Rights Consortium, attended the UN Commission on the status of women in New York. MCNI is also represented through this project on a variety of bodies including the PSNIDSV Independent Advisory Council; Nexus Independent Advisory Council Sexual Offences; TEO violence against women and girls co-design group; DfC gender equality strategy; all Ireland women's forum and the all-party groups on homelessness, mental health, cancer and trafficking.



EU Settlement Scheme Advice and Support:

The EUSS Team has provided a wide variety of advice and support for individuals applying to the EU settlement scheme including sourcing and uploading additional residence documents. The team has signposted individuals to other services including welfare benefits, domestic abuse, hate crime, employment issues, debt, and other immigration services (visa applicants). They have also provided help with contacting consular services for clients to obtain replacement documents.

The main vulnerable groups supported has included children; clients with disabilities; homeless / rough sleepers; those who are IT illiterate or are unable to access appropriate devices to upload documents; Roma / Gypsy / Travellers; as well as those without English language skills.



Global Majority Fund: MCNI has continued to deliver the Global Majority Fund supporting funded projects for BAME and global majority community groups on a variety of issues including hate crime against the Muslim community; domestic abuse and violence; working with young people through sports; working with children and young people to reduce isolation and stigma; working with older people; working with asylum seekers and refugees, poverty and deprivation.

Community Engagement Programme:

Beginning in January 2023, this project is supported by the National Lottery Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities Pilot Programme. We have identified community engagement as a priority to reach under-served communities to promote access to service provision and civic participation and to foster good relations between communities.

The project will conduct outreach with black, Asian and minority ethnic communities in NI to promote services that they may not be receiving, develop the capacity of the sector in NI, and contribute to increased understanding, dialogue, and sense of belonging. Work has already started with some of the most vulnerable including the East Timor Community and Filipino fishermen.

■ Women at work and in society

In addition to the extensive work undertaken by our own regional Women's Committee and the emerging branch networks, UNISON continues to play a key role in the wider women's movement.

We are members of, or support, a wide range of women's organisations including the ICTU Women's Committee; the Women's Policy Group; the Women's Budget Group; the Women's Research and Development Agency; the NI European Women's Platform; Alliance for Choice; Reclaim the Agenda; and the Women's Support Network. The following are some of the critical initiatives we support.

The **Women's Policy Group NI** is a platform for women working in policy and advocacy roles to share their work and speak with a collective voice on key issues. It is made up of women from trade unions, grassroots women's organisations, networks, feminist campaigning organisations, LGBT+ organisations, support service providers, human rights and equality organisations and individuals.

Through our membership, UNISON have contributed to a number of **Government consultations** including:

- Domestic and sexual abuse strategy;
- Violence against women and girls strategy;
- NI Executive period products consultation;
- Dept for Communities Budget EQIA;
- Dept of Education Budget 2023/24 and EQIA;
- Dept of Health EQIA of the 2023/24 Budget;
- Dept for the Economy 2023/25 budget consultation EQIA;
- EQIA of the Executive Office's spending plans for 2023/24;
- Dept for the Economy consultation on circular economy strategy;
- Miscarriage leave and pay consultation;
- Dept for Infrastructure consultation on concessionary fares.

We are involved in the **Where's Our Democracy** campaign which highlights the democratic deficit, and its impact on women caused by the lack of an Assembly and Executive.

We also contributed to the **Women's Policy Group manifesto** for the local government elections in May 2023 and hosted their hustings event in Galway House for women's organisations and individuals to ask questions to candidates. All of the main parties were invited to participate and 5 attended - People Before Profit, Ulster Unionist Party, Alliance Party, SDLP and Green Party NI.

Regional Committee and our Women's Committee developed motions in support of the **Feminist Recovery Plan** which were carried at both ICTU and UNISON conferences. As earlier reported, key recommendations in the plan are central to many of our demands in both the No going back to normal campaign and our challenge to the cost of living crisis.



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 remains one of our core demands of Government.

Through ICTU and in partnership with the TUC we continue to press the UK Government to ratify **ILO C190 against violence and harassment in the world of work**. The NI Executive has already confirmed to the UK Government its agreement to ratification, following extensive lobbying.



Solidarity

■ UNISON Solidarity Group

The members of our UNISON NI Solidarity Group continue to be deeply involved in a wide variety of initiatives including hosting a range of UNISON activity through social media platforms, seminars and film nights.

We also continue to be involved in other global solidarity work through our Group, our self-organised groups and branches.

The Group continues to prioritise work on Palestine, Colombia and Cuba in addition to other international solidarity projects identified by branches or through our self organised groups.

ICTU Global Solidarity: A UNISON delegation attended the Global Solidarity Summer School in Armagh in August. Plenary sessions took place on:

- the state of trade union rights around the world with speakers from Turkey, Myanmar, Belarus, Tunisia and the ITUC;
- Tackling the Far Right – the Congress programme; and
- Solidarity with the people and workers of Palestine – including a presentation from the Regional Secretary.

Our UNISON NDC delegates extensively supported the fringe meetings on Palestine, Colombia and Cuba.

■ Palestine

The Solidarity Group and many of our branches have continued to prioritise support for the Palestinian people and our organisers, Caitlin Ni Chathail, Susan Neill, and senior secretary Liz Robinson give extensive support to both the UNISON group and Trade Union Friends of Palestine. As a consequence of this joint work, we have taken on organising roles for both TUFPP and ETUN.

Branch solidarity: Conor McCarthy and Margaret McKee from Royal & Muckamore branch and Kevin Hillick from Down Education branch visited the Lajee Centre in Aida Camp in the Westbank in early November 2022. It is hoped that a solidarity pamphlet, encouraging support for health and education projects in the Lajee Centre will be ready for Council.

In August 2023, the RVH and Muckamore branch again hosted the annual Gaza hill walk. We continue to press for intervention from the Irish Government on the ever-increasing pressure exerted on the people of Gaza by the Israeli Government's increasing attacks.

A comprehensive motion on Palestine was submitted by the Royal Hospitals and Muckamore branch. This created extensive debate at NDC and was carried.

European Trade Union Network on Palestine (ETUN): Organised with the support of Cailin Ni Chathail, the Regional Secretary chaired the first ETUN fringe meeting on Palestine at the ETUC Congress in Berlin in May with contributors from Palestine, Norway and the TUC. The fringe received extensive support from country delegations including Christina McAnea as part of the TUC delegation.

ICTU: The Regional Secretary was part of a 4 person delegation, including Kevin Callinan - President, Phil Ni Sheaghda - Vice-President and Assistant General Secretary of ICTU, to Palestine. She made an interim report at the Global summer school in August. The full delegation report is currently being prepared.



Trade Union Friends of Palestine: We continue to support TUPF with resources. The Regional Secretary is the Chair and efforts will now be made to replace Eamon as Secretary. UNISON branches and staff attend the main TUPF meetings and Susan Neill (AO) and Caitlin Ni Chathail (RO) are key members of the TUPF steering group.

In August, members of the UNISON team met with Ramzy Baroud, internationally recognised journalist and writer, as part of a TUPF Steering group meeting with him on future strategies. He was also the keynote speaker for Palestine Day at the West Belfast Feile in a session

chaired by the Regional Secretary. All branches are encouraged to affiliate to TUPF as our main vehicle for delivering solidarity actions in support of the Palestinian people. UNISON will continue to provide resources and support for the effective operation of TUPF.

We are pleased to announce the restart of the Ambassadors programme to Palestine from 10th to 18th November. Caitlin Ni Chathail has taken on the organising role. The delegation will consist of reps from UNISON, INTO, Forsa, TUI, Nipsa and Mandate. UNISON will comprise the majority on this visit.



■ Colombia

Regional Committee continues to encourage branch affiliation to Justice for Colombia (JfC) 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. Since the start of 2023, over 100 trade unionists and social activists have been murdered. We continue to support the Peace Process. Our sister union Forsa sponsors the JfC Peace Monitor and we have now sent several delegates on the fact finding visits.

The Regional Secretary is a board member of JfC, representing ICTU with the Forsa General Secretary, Kevin Callanin. She chaired the Colombia fringes at both NDC and the ICTU biennial in Kilkenny. The guest speaker at NDC was human rights defender Darnelly Rodriguez who spoke of the continuing assassinations of trade unionists and other human rights defenders by the right wing paramilitaries. We also heard of the plight of young political prisoners sentenced to long custodial sentences for taking part in protests.



■ Cuba

Branches are encouraged to affiliate to the Cuba Solidarity campaign and support its actions.



Following the ICTU motions calling for the immediate ending of the illegal blockade of Cuba (which has for the 29th time been condemned by the UN General Assembly) and calling on the Irish Government to use its position on the UN Security Council to help end the illegal blockade, we have been in touch with the Solidarity Group established with the Cuban Embassy in Ireland. It is currently fundraising for a legal action against the blockade in the International Court.

As previously reported, the 'Cuba under blockade' fringe at National Delegate Conference was well supported by NI delegates. The meeting discussed fighting

sanctions and building solidarity. Cuba faces severe shortages as a world economic crisis exacerbates the existing hardships caused by an inhumane 61-year US blockade. In addition, Cuba's inclusion on the US gove61-years spurious 'State Sponsors of Terrorism' is further strangling economic development and resources.

UNISON May Day delegation participants gave eye-witness counts on how Cubans are resisting despite current difficulties, as well as practical measures that UNISON members can take to demonstrate their solidarity. Special guest from Cuba included Lissette Rubio Mederos, Cuban education specialist and Federation of Cuban Women member.

The blockade will feature as an area for further action at the forthcoming joint regions seminar.



■ Solidarity work with others

We are affiliated to a wide range of solidarity campaigns including in Central and South America, Turkey and Afghanistan. We are also resuming our joint work with other UNISON regions and will participate in the restored annual seminar with Scotland, North West and Northern regions at the end of October 2023.

We continue to be members of both the NIC ICTU Global solidarity and the ICTU global solidarity committee.



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.

Patricia McKeown and Anne Speed were both re-elected to the **Executive Council** for a 2 year term ending in 2025. Deborah Yapicioz was elected to the standing orders committee.

The **Biennial Conference** took place in Kilkenny in July 2023. The theme of conference was, 'Making work pay – Unions transforming work and workplaces'. UNISON motions on '25 years of the Good Friday Agreement' and 'Protect workers' rights and promote equality' were passed unanimously.



The delayed **NIC ICTU Conference** took place in Enniskillen at the end of November 2022. John Patrick Clayton and Patricia McKeown were re-elected to the **NI Committee**, and James Large was elected to the conference arrangements committee.

UNISON motions on the 'Cost of living crisis', 'Fighting for health and social care services', and 'the Climate emergency and just transition' were passed unanimously.

The UNISON team represents Congress on a range of groups and we are supporting a variety of ICTU campaigns including cost of living, joint union pay campaigns, global solidarity campaigns, campaigns against public sector cuts and in support of the Peace Process. Table 14 sets out UNISON involvement in the Congress.



Regional Committee continues to encourage UNISON activists to become involved in local **Trades Councils**.

Throughout the year, members and activists participated in **ICTU virtual events, seminars and training programmes** on a wide range of trade union priorities. Full UNISON delegations participated in the Global Solidarity Summer School in Armagh in August 2023, the ICTU women's seminar in March and the North South retired members' seminar in August 2023.

The **May Day march and rally** took place in Belfast on 30 April 2023. Hundreds of UNISON members joined the event with speakers including the Regional Secretary and RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch.



Table 14 - UNISON representation on ICTU structures

ICTU Structure and purpose	UNISON representation
ICTU Executive ¹	Patricia McKeown and Anne Speed
NI Committee, ICTU ²	Patricia McKeown and John Patrick Clayton
ICTU Equality & Human Rights Group ³	Patricia McKeown and John Patrick Clayton
ICTU Conference Arrangement Committee	Deborah Yapicioz
ICTU Women's Committee ⁴	Danielle McCusker (Vice Chair) and Deborah Yapicioz
ICTU Health Services Committee ⁵	Anne Speed (Chair), Patricia McKeown, Joe McCusker and Maura McKenna
ICTU Education TU Group ⁶	Anne Speed (Chair) and Heather McKinstry
ICTU Public Services Group	RMT, senior lay reps and regional organisers
ICTU Disability Committee ⁷	Amanda Sweetlove
ICTU Black and Minority Ethnic Committee	Patrick Yu
ICTU LGBT Committee ⁷	Alexis Dickson
ICTU Retired Members	Angela Boorman and Archie Thomson
ICTU Youth Forum ⁷	Lorna McLarnon and Emer Kelly
ICTU Education Officers Group ⁸	Caitlin Ni Chathail
ICTU Health & Safety Committee ⁷	Ray Rafferty (Chair) and Emma Jane Cullen (Vice Chair)
ICTU Solidarity Committee North and South	Susan Neill, Mary Ferris, Kevin Hillick, Conor McCarthy and Patricia McKeown (ex officio)
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 AND MANAGEMENT



Finance & managing resources

■ Summary Accounts – Lay Activity Fund

The audited regional accounts for the year ending 31 December 2022 will be distributed at Regional Council.

The UNISON NI lay activity budget for 2022 was £108,148.96. The allocation for 2023 is £108,622.44 representing a 0.4% 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 £2,680 was donated to projects through the following organisations:

- Durham miners' gala and museum
- Reclaim the Agenda
- Belfast City of Sanctuary
- Kevin Bell repatriation trust
- Grove football club
- Celtic boys football club
- NAKBA (Palestinian event)
- Celtic night at NDC
- Women in media
- Foyle Pride
- IPSC (Palestine Day)

Regional Committee also affiliated to the following organisations:

- Trade Union Friends of Palestine
- Justice for Colombia
- Reclaim the Enlightenment
- Nicaragua Solidarity
- National Pensioners' Convention
- Cuba Solidarity
- Linen Hall Library
- CAJ
- Centre for Global Education
- Law Centre
- Irish Labour History Society
- HPPS staff side



■ Branch finance

Once again, all branches submitted their AFR on time and within rule. As always full support was available to all branches, many of which took up the offer of assistance.

NI branches are scheduled for audit in 2024. Branches are encouraged to upload receipts onto the OLBA system to enable some audits to be conducted remotely.

■ Income and RMS

The priority remains to monitor employers to ensure that their payroll systems continue to collect unions subs and that membership applications are processed on a timely basis. The RMS team has successfully recovered subscription income from a number of small employers. In addition to normal data cleansing, a major

exercise has been completed for the recent Local Government Pay & Grading Ballot.

Total income returned to Head Office increased to £5,230,076.63. This represents a 2% increase on the previous year (£5,147,265.11). Total income returned to branches for 2022 was £1,194,536.99.

■ Premises

Galway House was fully operational in 2023. We have hosted a number of courses, meetings and events, including external organisations. The redevelopment work on Galway House has been delayed and we have been asked to submit a further business case in the light of changes.

North West Support Centre remains closed due to structural and health and safety issues. We will be vacating the site in early 2024 into temporary alternative serviced accommodation in order to retain our

footprint in Derry. We remain as a registered interested party for the new development in Ebrington as a permanent move.



*UNISON Centre,
Galway House*



*NW Support Centre,
The Old Church*

■ Environmental sustainability

We continue to implement UNISON's environmental sustainability policy in the management of our premises and throughout our administrative systems. We monitor energy efficiency and will further review when work commences on the premises.

We currently hold 78% of our members email addresses and 82% of their mobile

numbers. Where possible we use these databases to communicate with our members and as a result have significantly reduced any surface mail being dispatched from the office. All AGM communication is now done via email and text with surface mail only being sent to members who have not supplied their email or phone numbers.

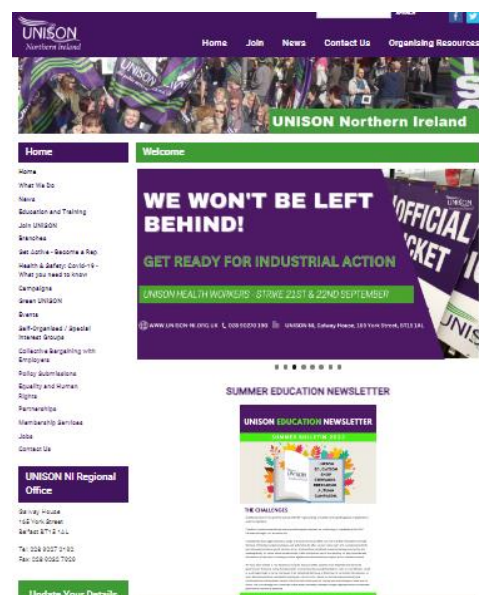
■ Administrative systems and front-line communication

IT equipment & systems: NI has been chosen as the pilot region for a new nationwide IT programme. MERLIN is replacing RMS, WARMS and MCT. However different users will have different levels of access. Full access to RMS will be available to RMS staff for a short period of time after the launch of MERLIN.

UNISON NI Website: Throughout 2022/23 the website has been regularly updated including a new rolling homepage banner; new strike pages; a social care project page; online newsletters and AGM information; and campaign videos. The news and job vacancy pages are regularly updated.

As at 11 September 2023, we have 15,281 followers on our **Facebook** page. This is an 11% increase over the year. Over the 90-day period from 13 Jun to 10 Sept 2023 our Facebook post reach was 102,244. We had 1,846 individual likes on posts, 10,848 clicks

on links to further information, 148 comments on posts and 527 shares of posts on to other pages. We remain the most followed Facebook page for unions in NI with almost double the following of all other union pages.



We now have 4,080 followers on **Twitter @UNISONNI** - a 9% increase over the year. Like other organisations we are exploring alternatives to this platform. From Oct 2022 – Sept 2023 we have sent 126 tweets, made 284,871 Impressions on user pages, had 926 of our tweets reshared by other accounts and had 3,490 likes. We are frequently tagged by other organisations and users. We mostly use this platform to share press releases to be picked up by media and engage in wider UNISON campaigns through hashtags.

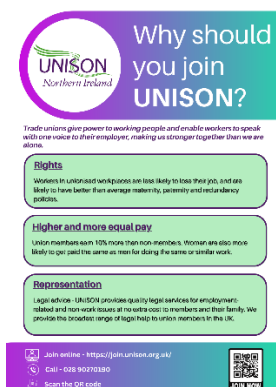
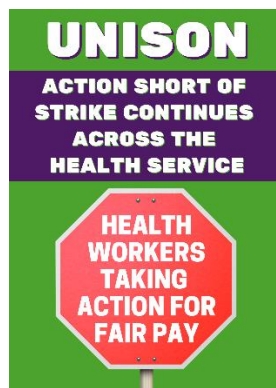


We have restarted using this platform to post images especially around the Smartpass protest in August, the education ballot and the climate strike protest in September. We currently have 730 followers and it is an area we would like to build on in the coming year, especially to reach younger members in the union to become active or to attract new 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.

An increased number of branches are using WARMS for direct contact with members. While the WARMS system has been down, a new system called ADESTRA has been trialled for sending bulk emails. We piloted a homeware email sent through the new system and have found that although it provides the ability to bulk email and a more UNISON branded layout for emails, the process for uploading data, content and the approval process makes this option more time consuming than sending emails through WARMS and RMS.

During the run up to industrial action in Health, the system was used to send information to members in various trusts about picket lines and industrial action zoom meetings.



Staffing

Regional Committee records its thanks to the staff team for all their work throughout 2022/2023.

We are pleased to have been allocated a Regional Organiser post to kick start the Strategic Organising project for a 12-month period. We have secured 2 new posts for the UNISON College (a Learning &

Development Organiser and a Member Engagement Organiser) and 3 new Local Organisers supported by the Branch Support and Organising Fund. We have a Regional Organiser (T) covering secondment and have recently advertised a number of permanent replacement posts and fixed term organising posts.

Our current staff team is:

Regional Management Team

- Patricia McKeown - Regional Secretary
- Thomas Mahaffy - Head of Organising & Development
- Anne Speed - Head of Bargaining and Representation

Administration

- Michele Bradford – Regional Administrator
- Anne Campbell - Team Support
- Grainne Campbell - Receptionist
- Gemma Curran - Receptionist
- Shelley King - Secretary
- Roslyn McCartney - RMS Supervisor
- Alison Meshida - RMS Clerk
- Brenda Peel - RMS Clerk
- Liz Robinson - Senior Secretary

Specialist Staff

- John Patrick Clayton - Policy Officer
- Sharrona Clinton - Communications & Digital Engagement Officer
- Rebekah Corbett - Local Organiser (Research & Development)
- Caoímhe McNeill - Policy & Bargaining Support Organiser

UNISON College

- Marianne Buick - Learning & Development Organiser
- Caroline Butler - Member Engagement Organiser
- Caitlín Ní Chathail - Regional Organiser (Education)

Organising

- Claire Bolt - Area Organiser
- Nuala Conlon - Regional Organiser
- Nathalie Donnelly - Local Organiser
- James Large - BSOF Local Organiser
- Conor McCarthy - Regional Organiser
- Orlaith McCarthy - BSOF Local Organiser
- Danielle McCusker - Area Organiser
- Joe McCusker - Regional Organiser
- Susan Neill - Area Organiser
- Louise O'Hara - Regional Organiser
- Noreen Robinson - BSOF Local Organiser



A tribute to Pamela Dooley, from Patricia McKeown, Regional Secretary

UNISON is in mourning at the death of our own Pamela Dooley - an inspirational and utterly determined trade union leader.

As our Head of Organising, Pamela helped UNISON to grow to the largest union in NI. Along the way she touched the lives of thousands of workers and their families. We owe her a great debt.

She was the first to organise workers in the community and voluntary sector 30 years ago. At her initiative, we organised Filipino workers when they arrived into our hospitals and care homes. She saved many from exploitation. She worked with Traveller families to challenge discrimination.

She brought the union's Education Programme to women in prisons. She rescued trafficked women and campaigned against domestic violence.

Pamela dedicated years to developing our branches, encouraging women members, building our LGBT+ membership and growing our Black and Migrant Workers organisation. Today we are the single largest organisation of black and migrant workers. Our union branches have grown stronger under her guidance.

In ICTU, as Chair of the Northern Women's Committee, Chair of the NI Committee and a member of the Executive Council, she bore her responsibilities with dignity and determination.



She led thousands in the protest march against the G8 and thousands more in the peace rally after the murder of Ronan Kerr. She was a key part of the ICTU delegation which brought our main political parties to Colombia to support that Peace Process.

On behalf of the movement, Pamela gave evidence to Westminster and NI Assembly committees challenging human trafficking, domestic violence and the need for the UK Government to extend UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security to NI.

After retiring from her position as Head of Organising, Pamela became Chair of the Migrant Centre NI and fought for funding that has put it in a position of strength today. She continued to lead UNISON's partnerships in the health service and to the very end dedicated herself to training our women members and new stewards. We recall only a fraction of her achievements.

Throughout all these struggles and achievements Pamela refused to let the breast cancer which had struck her decades before, define her life. She shared her experiences with other women and supported them. She did it her way to the end. And her way was one of outstanding integrity, compassion and unswerving dedication to those in need of support and those she loved.

She was my colleague and my friend and a friend to so many more. We send our love and condolences to Caroline, her daughter, another member of the UNISON team. We will all miss her deeply but we will keep the flame alight.

A tribute to Pamela Dooley, from Migrant Centre NI

Pamela was one of the driving forces in the establishment of the Migrant Centre NI. Her vision and passion for the rights of everybody meant she had a deep understanding of what was needed to tackle the discrimination and exploitation of the new migrant worker communities in NI following the expansion of the EU in the early 2000s.

She recognised the value that diversity brings to NI and how immigration contributes positively to a vibrant, healthy society with new ideas and approaches.

Her commitment to equality and fighting injustice, regardless of the circumstances, drove her to lead the organisation through some of its darkest times when closure loomed.

But her determination and strength of character, together with the support of her daughter Caroline, meant that she never gave up. Because of this, the Board and staff of the organisation have sought to follow in her footsteps and the organisation is now thriving and stronger than ever. This would not have been possible without Pamela.



The staff and board of the Migrant Centre NI are forever indebted to her.

Pamela was a unique person and a true leader. As you all know she could be tough, and rightly so, when she needed to be, and this I think drove people to be the best they could be, with her as a role model.

She had such compassion for people, and determination to overcome barriers placed in the way of the Migrant Centre NI which we will never forget.

In many ways the Migrant Centre NI is at the core of her legacy, and her powerful character will continue to be a driving force for equality and rights for migrant workers and people from BAME backgrounds in NI.



Remembering Inez

On the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, and the 30th anniversary of UNISON, we remember the inspirational role played by our former Regional Secretary and leading trade unionist Inez McCormack.

The following are abstracts from an article in the Journal of the Centre for Cross Border Studies by Martin O'Brien, Director Social Change Initiative and former Director of CAJ. Inez and Martin were founding members of the Equality Coalition which continues to be co-convened by UNISON and CAJ today.

There has been much said this year about who made what contribution to what would ultimately become our Peace Agreement. The people most obviously absent from that discourse are the trade unionists, community activists and ordinary people who ultimately build the real peace.



We thank Martin for highlighting the role played by Inez and UNISON, as well as the key role played by CAJ.

Extracts from an article in the Journal of the Centre for Cross Border Studies by Martin O'Brien, Director Social Change Initiative and former Director of CAJ

I co-convened the Equality Coalition with Inez McCormack, who headed up UNISON in Northern Ireland, a UK-wide trade union. She was central to this work and was the driving force for a fairer, more equal society over many years.

She successfully used her extensive networks of contacts across the two islands, in Europe and particularly in the United States, to champion the inclusion of substantial human rights and equality measures in the peace agreement. Importantly unions were also connected on an all-island basis via the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, of which Inez later became the first woman President.



One groundbreaking manifestation of this work was UNISON's collaboration with other North-South entities to equality-proof the cross-border 12-county EU Peace and Reconciliation funding programme.

This led to the seminal Making Women Seen and Heard report in March 1998, just before the Agreement. The report was launched with the support of the then European Commissioner for Regional Policy.

Similar efforts to focus on disadvantage and exclusion led to the early roots of the Participation and the Practice of Rights group. So, from a 'place apart', Northern Ireland's burgeoning human rights community seeded and mobilised a range of important North-South, East-West initiatives.

By working together on a North-South and East-West basis with the support of the international human rights community, we managed to bring human rights concerns from the margins to the mainstream.

The shared positions and consensus we developed became the orthodoxy and effectively shaped the future narrative and agenda to address human rights and equality concerns in Northern Ireland.

As the negotiations to reach an agreement intensified, we maintained our links with the local political parties, the British, Irish and US governments. In the negotiations' final stages, we went so far as to provide concrete wording to address particular issues and many of the suggestions made their way into the final text of the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. A number of the parties, particularly the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, were key advocates for the inclusion of solid provisions to protect and advance human rights and equality.

A careful reading of the Agreement shows the influence this coalition of groups had, which can be traced back to the work it began in 1992. The investments in developing a North-South and East-West consensus on these issues were powerfully effective and yielded significant returns.

In December 1998, CAJ and UNISON hosted a conference in Belfast, and the keynote speaker was Mary Robinson, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. In her speech, she paid tribute to the work of both organisations and said:

'Few documents emerging from divisive and difficult political negotiations have so well captured the importance of fairness in creating right relationships. In its preambular paragraphs, throughout the text, and indeed in all the new institutions and mechanisms established as a result of the Agreement, concerns around fairness and justice are a recurring theme.'



Inez with founding members of the Equality Coalition. Back row from left – Patrick Yu, Marie Mulholland, Martin O'Brien, Maggie Beirne, Joanne Vance and Patricia McKeown. Front row from left – Jennifer Yu, Monica Wilson and Fiona McCausland

Brexit presented significant threats to these human rights gains, and civil society groups across Britain and Ireland have again mobilised to minimise the damage by securing specific provisions in the Ireland/NI Protocol to ensure no diminution of rights protections.

In the coming period, it's increasingly clear that we will all have to work hard together to deliver on the promise of the Agreement and to address the emerging and growing challenges associated with the unfolding debate about future constitutional arrangements.

I believe a focus on ensuring fairness and protecting and advancing human rights, and equality must be central to those conversations.

Building strong North-South and East-West relationships, dialogue and consensus on the importance of that will be indispensable to success.

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