

## Who's Who on the Regional Committee in 2020/2021

### Joint Regional Convenors

		Meetings
Gabrielle Carton	Classroom Assistant, Ardnashee School & College, Derry	4
James Large	Pharmacy Technician, Ulster Hospital, Belfast	4

### Committee Members

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

### NEC Members in Attendance

Gillian Foley	Community Worker, Intensive Community Care, SEHSCT	3**
Alastair Long	Ambulance Personnel, Larne Ambulance Depot	4
Margaret McKee	Catering Assistant, Royal Hospitals, Belfast	3
Catherine McKenna	Catering Assistant/Bus Escort - Holy Child PS, Belfast	1***

\*S Rutherford resigned January 2021 \*\*G Foley NEC member to June 2021 \*\*\*C McKenna elected to NEC June 2021

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# Introduction

Our members have again delivered vital public services and our union representatives have risen to all challenges in the face of a continuing global pandemic. They have again confronted crises across all sectors by engaging in intensive collective bargaining, presenting solutions to service delivery problems, representing our members in trouble, continuous political campaigning and smart organising. As a result, we have a growing membership and an amazing determination to bring about social change by acting with one voice. That is what makes UNISON strong.

We present an Annual Report covering 2020/21, which is a summary of challenges and achievements. Last year at our Annual Regional Council we mourned our losses and celebrated our victories. We said farewell to one General Secretary and, at the first Regional Committee of 2021, we celebrated the election of another. We are very proud to be led by Christina McAnea, our first woman General Secretary, leading a union of more than a million women members. Most of those members have borne the brunt of the pandemic, both at work and at home. It is our job to secure justice for them.

This year, we mourn the loss of hundreds more people - our members, our activists and members of their families among them. Covid deaths in 18 months have surpassed the total over decades of the conflict. We offer our condolences. We pay tribute to our members for their extraordinary dedication and for risking their own health and safety to protect the rest of us.

It is increasingly clear that the UK Government is determined to go back to the old normal or worse. Public service workers are being denied pay justice, and changes to welfare, taxation and social security will again hit the poorest in our society.



We continue to exert pressure on the NI Government to back up its commitments in the New Decade New Approach agreement with action in place of rhetoric and division. As Regional Council plans our campaign for the forthcoming NI Assembly election, we are determined to hold all parties to account.

We are equally determined to confront those parties that have attacked our policies or that attempt to use our union for their own political gain.

At Council we are presenting progress in our Free School Meals For All Campaign and we are immensely proud that thousands of children, their parents, teachers and local communities participated in the art competition as part of the campaign. The campaign is an outstanding example of UNISON branches, from all sectors, working together in partnership with the regional team to secure social and economic rights.

Poverty and low income is the major contributor to the deaths from Covid-19. It has disproportionately impacted the lives of women, the BAME community, older people, those with a disability, and the vulnerable young. Advancing their rights, by working with them, is a core element of our organising, bargaining and political work.

The UNISON team continues to campaign tirelessly. We have engaged with all political parties, the British and Irish Governments, and EU and US political representatives demanding protection for our members, public services and the Peace Process itself.

In addition to the jobs and businesses destroyed by Covid-19, we still face the looming impact of Brexit.

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

At home we have supported the campaign for pension justice for survivors of the conflict and will debate the UK Government's so called 'amnesty proposal' at this year's Council. We pay tribute to members, branches and staff for their campaigning work on Palestine in the face further brutal attacks by the Israeli government, and to our Women's Committees at branch and regional level on their support for the women of Afghanistan.

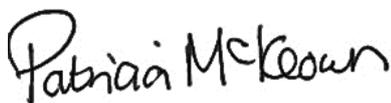
Much of this work has been possible through the development of our UNISON College online training programmes, interactive online sessions and webinars. We are proud to have sustained and developed our education programme throughout this critical time.

None of this work would be possible without a dedicated UNISON staff team and elected representatives supporting each other.

At the 2020 Council, we elected James Large as new Joint Regional Convenor working with our longstanding Joint Regional Convenor, Gabrielle Carton. Gabrielle is taking early retirement and will preside over her final Council meeting this year. We will take this opportunity to honour her contribution to the union.

Our Northern Ireland NEC members, Margaret McKee, Alastair (Ali) Long and Catherine McKenna were elected in 2021 and are striving to ensure that the rights of our members in NI are properly represented at all levels of the NEC. Regional Committee has called on the incoming NEC to protect the values, principles and rules of UNISON by conducting an equality impact assessment across its structures.

As we present our Annual Report, Regional Committee takes this opportunity to pay tribute to the hard work and dedication of our members, activists and staff throughout 2020/21, and we look forward to working together to advance our union agenda in the year to come.



Patricia McKeown,  
Regional Secretary



James Large,  
Joint Regional Convenor



Gabrielle Carton,  
Joint Regional Convenor

# UNISON Objectives and Plan

## NI Regional Council

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

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

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

report to NI Regional Council is a record of the work of the Regional Committee and all lay structures since the last annual meeting of the Council in October 2020.

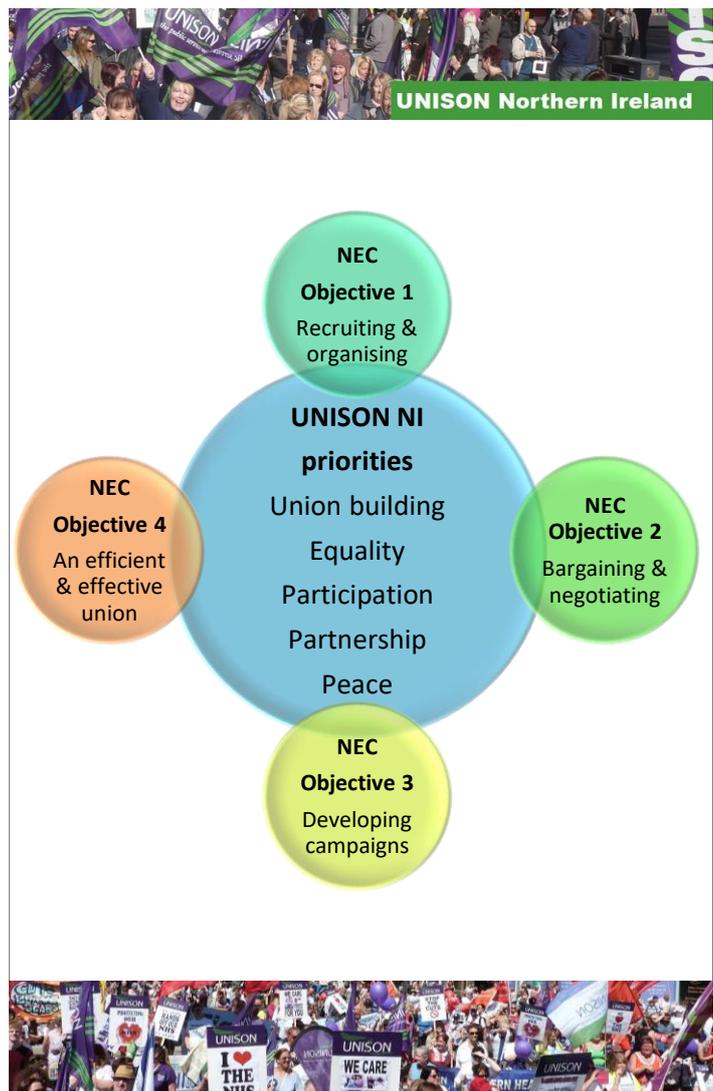
The Regional Committee takes this opportunity to thank all UNISON members, activists and staff for their role in making the past year such a success despite the many unprecedented challenges facing us over the period.

## The UNISON NI Plan 2021

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 2020 and 2021

**Overview:** This section of the report details the progress of the NI Regional Committee recruitment and organising strategy. It will show that despite the major challenges posed by the pandemic, 2020 was another year of substantial recruitment and membership growth in NI. Although 2021 has proven to be a much more challenging organising environment across the union, significant progress continues to be made and our yearly target of 5000 remains achievable, particularly if we are able to capitalise on the potential of our new pay campaigns in health and education and our many other bargaining, representation and campaigning successes.

In these difficult and challenging times, Regional Committee commends the ongoing commitment and tireless activity of activists and staff across our union-building agenda at workplace, branch and regional level.

**Our success during 2020:** At the outset of the pandemic in March 2020, Regional Committee recognised the importance of increasing our visibility and using all our resources to defend and fight for the interests of our members and to establish UNISON as the 'go-to' union for workers needing protection, support and advice on all employment, health and safety issues arising from the pandemic. As a result, we refocused our Plan to maximise the use of existing and new regional and branch communications, social media platforms and our online UNISON College Education Programme as primary recruitment tools.

Our strategy was successful, and we again ended the year in significant 3% growth, reaching the significant milestone of 45,000 full members and becoming the largest union in NI. Our strategy has also helped to facilitate member participation and has supported our wider organising, bargaining and campaigning objectives.



**Our progress and challenges during 2021:** Despite our success during 2020, Regional Committee were well aware that ongoing restrictions on traditional face-to-face recruitment, organising and member engagement activities would create major recruitment challenges if maintained throughout 2021.

These challenges have again centred on the 'chicken and egg' situation where we have an urgent priority to identify, recruit and train more stewards to engage with our members, particularly during the pandemic. However, the pandemic has continued to restrict us from pursuing our original programme of multiple face to face workplace meetings and stewards' elections.

This remains a major challenge as, to be sustainable, the Regional Committee strategy is dependent on branches increasing their stewards base across all areas and workplaces. The decline in the number of new activists coming forward, particularly during the pandemic, has been recognised as a union-wide issue and we are a member of a special working group established by HQ.

In response, the staff team have continued to support branches to initiate a series of online members meetings to support the election or re-election of stewards. These were particularly useful in the run up to the 2021 AGMs and will continue until such time that physical meetings can resume in a more systematic way across employers and workplaces.

## UNISON NI recruitment strategy



### Our Targets

- 5000 new joiners
- 90% branches on target
- Growth across all sectors
- 10% reduction in leavers



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



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



Build a comprehensive network of trained and active stewards across all workplaces and employers



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



New retention strategies and support for UNISON-wide recruitment initiatives



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



Maximise branch effectiveness and member participation

## Our key achievements



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



Above target recruitment & growth in 2020

- 5487 new joiners - 10% above target
- 3% yearly growth with 1217 more joiners than leavers



Sustained recruitment during 2021 despite pandemic restrictions

- 3331 recruited to end Sept
- On target to recruit 5000 by end Dec



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



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



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



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

## Regional Committee Recruitment Strategy

**2021:** During 2021 we have continued to prioritise the use of new communications and social media platforms to encourage new joiners and increase member participation. This has focused on maximising our visibility and communications reach to promote UNISON as the 'go-to' union for protection, support, and advice; to ensure that our members get all the information they need; and to publicise all our bargaining, representation and campaigning successes. It is essential that branches continue to have detailed recruitment and organising plans linked to these priorities; and that these are taken forward by a comprehensive network of trained and active stewards across all workplaces and employers.

During the year, activities that have secured membership increase have included:

- new pay campaigns in health, education and our demand for a real living wage across all sectors;
- challenging privatisation, unsafe staffing, job relocations and service closures;
- public policy campaigns across sectors to advance the position of our members, their families and communities, including our Free School Meals for All campaign and 'All We Need Is Lunch' Art Competition;
- our continuing campaign across the public service for the implementation of the statutory duty on equality - 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 key health & safety issues such as risk assessments, effective guidance, the use of PPE and Covid testing;
- challenging cuts to government funding to the community & voluntary sector and bargaining for recognition agreements - particularly in the private homecare and private nursing home sectors;
- our campaigns on the impact of EU exit;
- infill recruitment initiatives for key occupational groups, especially within health and education;
- supporting UNISON-wide recruitment initiatives;
- maximising student nurse recruitment;

- special recruitment and recognition initiatives within strategic growth areas such as private social care and nursing homes, dentists' and doctors' surgeries.



We have also continued to prioritise our UNISON College (NI) Education Programme as a key recruitment tool through the development of innovative online education and training programmes, member engagement and support. We continue to be recognised as the leader in this and our model is being replicated across UNISON. Further details are provided in 'The UNISON College' section of this report.

Other successful recruitment and retention projects have included:

- a phone bank to make direct contact with new members who have joined us online;
- ensuring that best practice recruitment initiatives are shared across branches;
- undertaking additional mapping activities to inform future organising and recruitment activity;
- outdoor stalls to facilitate direct face to face recruitment and engagement.

The recruitment impact of all these activities is assessed later in this section.

Our RMS team play a vital role in the Plan - maintaining centralised processing and databases in partnership with all branches, mapping for joint branch assessments and undertaking major data cleansing exercises in preparation for pay ballots. The team achieved a significant success with BSO which has now agreed a mechanism for transferring online joiners from direct debit to DOCAS.

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

## ■ Our recruitment achievements in 2020

5487 recruited

3% growth

45032 full members

Table 1 and Fig 1 shows that, despite the pandemic, 2020 was another successful year for UNISON NI in terms of recruitment and growth.

- We recruited 5487 new members – 10% above target;
- We had 1217 more joiners than leavers, achieved growth of 3%, and ended the year as the largest union in NI with a full membership of 45032 – an increase of 19% since 2016;
- 19 branches ended the year in growth;
- 78% of members joined online – up from 43% in 2019.

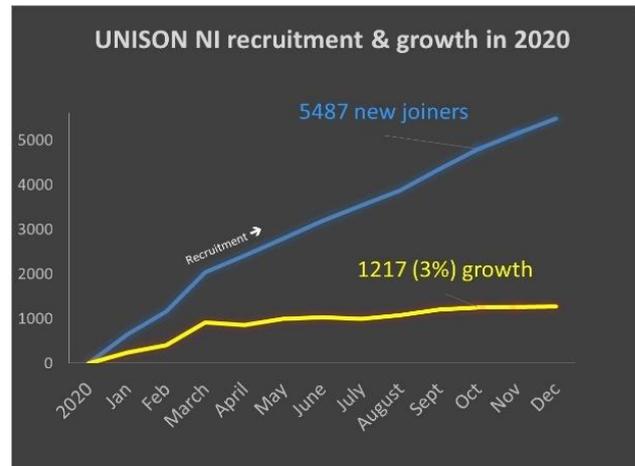


Table 1– UNISON NI recruitment and growth by branch, 1 Jan 2020 to 31 Dec 2020

Branch	2020 Recruitment & growth					1yr growth	2019 Total joiners
	Target	Total	(Jan to Sept)	(Oct to Dec)	% target met		
Belfast City Hospital	313	135	101	34	43%	↑4	234
Belfast Education	150	417	354	63	Target Met	↑161	324
Causeway	170	189	147	42	Target Met	↑65	250
Community & Voluntary	200	475	375	100	Target Met	↑190	406
Craigavon Health	140	175	133	42	Target Met	↓-25	355
Derry Education	150	159	123	36	Target Met	↑67	221
Down Education	150	208	174	34	Target Met	↑44	167
Down Lisburn	300	375	292	83	Target Met	↑129	491
Foyle	300	311	300	11	Target Met	↑43	541
Greenpark	110	68	48	20	62%	↓-9	104
Health Agencies	50	45	34	11	90%	↓-26	71
Mater Hospital Trust	100	55	46	9	55%	↓-34	104
N&W Belfast Health	162	271	196	75	Target Met	↑110	333
NEELB	150	254	216	38	Target Met	↑95	258
Newry & Mourne	200	130	106	24	65%	↓-8	235
NI Ambulance	85	66	52	14	78%	↑37	116
NI Blood Transfusion	12	7	6	1	58%	0	17
Northern Health	600	571	429	142	95%	↑111	771
Omagh & Fermanagh	240	211	153	58	88%	↑63	304
Orchard	160	256	192	64	Target Met	↑27	411
Rathgael	15	4	1	3	27%	↑2	2
RVH & Muckamore	463	250	188	62	54%	↓-40	561
South & East Belfast	200	231	180	51	Target Met	↑16	335
Southern Education	100	106	93	13	Target Met	↑25	126
Sperrin Devenish	80	75	55	20	94%	↑9	189
UCHT	300	420	333	87	Target Met	↑177	624
UU Coleraine Magee	40	6	6	0	15%	↓-11	17
UU Jordanstown	50	17	13	4	34%	↓-7	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>5000</b>	<b>5487</b>	<b>4346</b>	<b>1141</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>↑1217</b>	<b>(7586)</b>

## ■ Our recruitment achievements in 2021 to date

Table 2, on page 12, details:

- branch recruitment targets;
- recruitment activity from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021;
- online recruitment as a % of total branch recruitment;
- growth trends to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021;
- full membership growth trends over the past 6-years.

**During 2021 UNISON NI has grown to 45262 full members**

**Recruitment and growth:** During 2021 UNISON NI has grown to 45,262 full members and we remain the largest union in NI. Table 2 also shows that between 1 Jan and 30 Sept:

- 3301 new members were recruited;
- 4 branches have already met their yearly target in only 9 months;
- growth has taken place across 11 branches with the highest increases recorded in Orchard (73 members) and RVH & Muckamore (53 members).

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

- we have grown as a region by 19% - from 37,960 in 2016 to 45,262 to date in 2021.
- a total of 23 branches have grown;
- the 6 education branches have grown most significantly, the highest being Sperrin Devenish and Derry Education at 58% and 41% respectively;
- the 18 health branches remain in sustained growth, the highest being UCHT, NIBTS and Orchard at 44%, 30% and 28% respectively;
- in the community and voluntary sector, despite major funding problems, our membership has grown by 11%;
- branches that had limited access to the Fighting Fund between 2017 and 2020 are those that have more limited growth over the period.

As reported last year, the pandemic has led to major reorganisation inside many health branches, most notably the conversion of the

Mater Hospital to the main Covid hospital and the reorganisation in Southern Trust Hospitals, which has included the transfer of large numbers of staff across the service. As a result, the current recruitment figures are likely to change at branch level as many of the suspended services come back on-line.

In addition, a range of health services, including mental health services, now need to be properly located in the relevant health branches. However, there are new trends in health and social care workers leaving the service or moving to agency, raising issues about retaining UNISON membership. While we have very few members on furlough we are yet to see whether the significant number of admin members working from home will impact union membership.



**Online joiners:** Table 2 shows that during the year, 80% of new joiners joined online. This is an increase from 71% last year and only 43% in 2019. A number of projects are in place to ensure that we retain these new members, including (i) working with the BSO to transfer them from direct debit to DOCAS and (ii) contacting all new online joiners by telephone to welcome them to UNISON, check their details and refer any issues to the relevant branch.

The highest proportion of online joiners continue to come from branches with a membership spread over a wide geographic area or those with a wide range of community services. These include the Community & Voluntary sector branch (99% online joiners); Northern health (95%); South & East Belfast community (93%), and North & West Belfast community (88%).

Some of our education branches also have an above average number of online joiners including Belfast Education (92%), NEELB (88%) and Southern Education (88%).

Regional Committee is investigating the differing rates of online joiners across branches but initial findings would suggest, as expected, that in the Covid-19 environment and in the absence of stewards across many areas and workplaces, our new communications strategies and platforms are playing an increasingly important role in the recruitment process.

The lowest proportion of online joiners continue to come from single site health branches such as BCH (59%), Craigavon

Health (62%), Mater Hospital (44%) and RVH & Muckamore (70%).

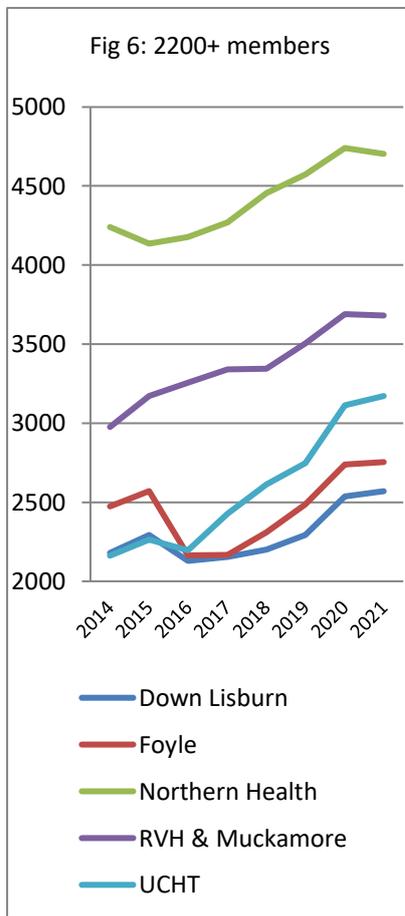
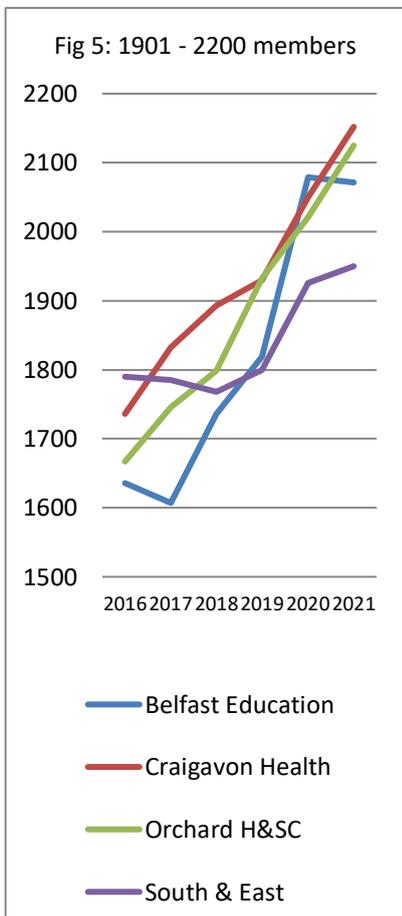
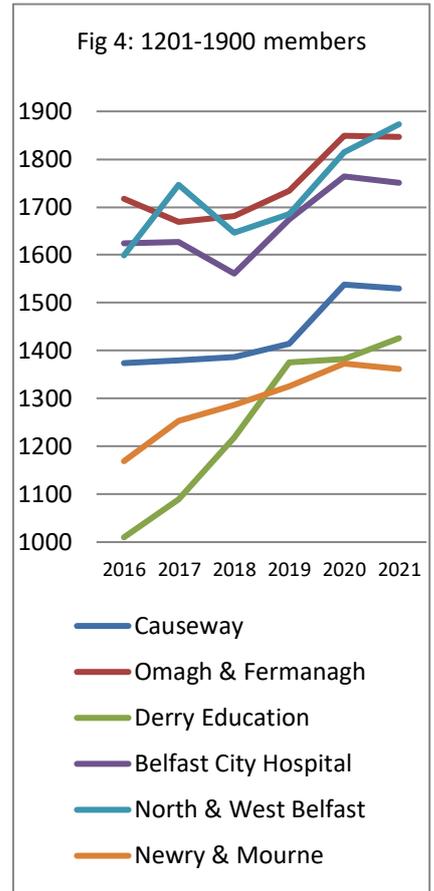
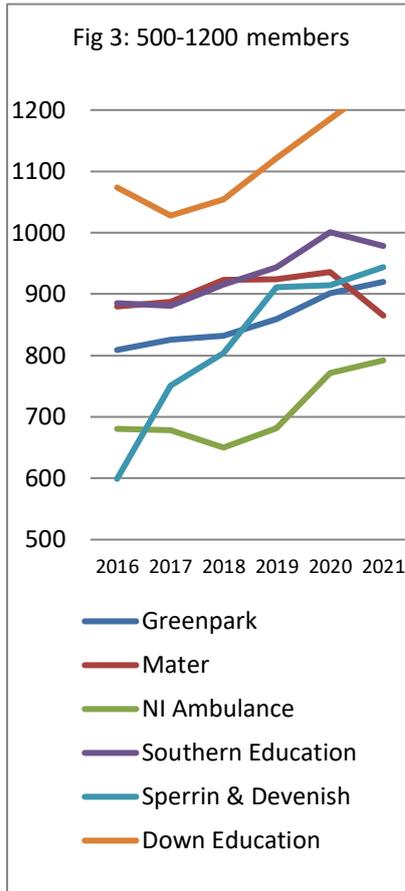
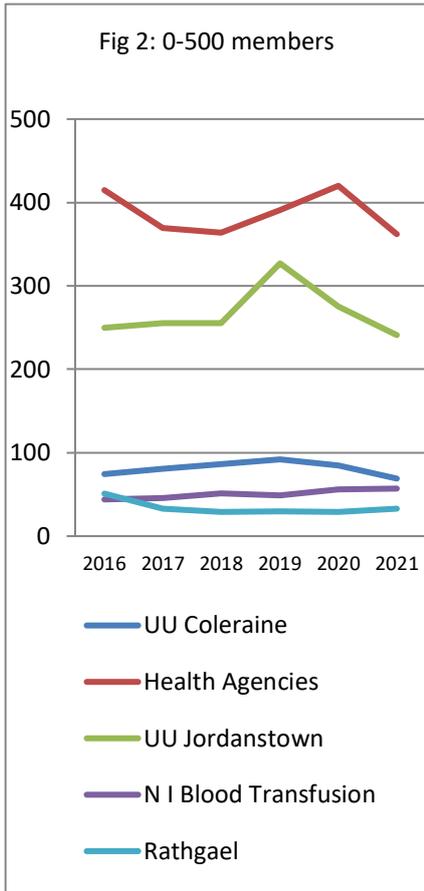
We are working with the IMPS staff in Manchester to explore how members are currently being allocated and to correct errors.



Table 2 – UNISON NI recruitment by branch, 1 Jan to 30 Sept 2021

Branch	Recruitment to date Jan-Sept 2021					Growth trends	
	Target	Total	% online joiners	No. to reach Target	% of target met to date	2021 to date (No.)	2016-2021 (%)
Belfast City Hosp	313	81	59%	232	26%	↓-14	↑8%
Belfast Education	150	139	92%	11	93%	↑6	↑27%
Causeway	170	114	65%	56	67%	↓-7	↑9%
Community & Voluntary	200	246	99%	Target Met	123%	↓-13	↑11%
Craigavon Health	140	185	62%	Target Met	132%	0	↑24%
Derry Education	150	61	62%	89	41%	↑14	↑41%
Down Education	150	91	70%	59	61%	↑27	↑16%
Down Lisburn	300	226	82%	74	75%	↓-7	↑16%
Foyle	300	200	87%	100	67%	↓-50	↑27%
Greenpark	110	52	60%	58	47%	↑13	↑14%
Health Agencies	50	18	89%	32	36%	↓-2	↓-12%
Mater Hospital Trust	100	39	44%	61	39%	↓-29	↓-2%
N&W Belfast Health	162	184	88%	Target Met	114%	↑28	↑17%
NEELB	150	68	88%	82	45%	↓-19	↑33%
Newry & Mourne	200	105	69%	95	53%	↑2	↑16%
NI Ambulance	85	61	80%	24	72%	↓-12	↑17%
NI Blood Transfusion	12	6	83%	6	50%	0	↑30%
Northern Health	600	303	95%	297	51%	↓-53	↑13%
Omagh & Fermanagh	240	115	74%	125	48%	↓-18	↑8%
Orchard	160	210	84%	Target Met	131%	↑73	↑28%
Rathgael	15	0	0	15	0	↓-1	↓-35%
RVH & Muckamore	463	243	70%	220	52%	↑53	↑13%
South & East Belfast	200	177	93%	23	89%	↑24	↑9%
Southern Education	100	34	88%	66	34%	↓-12	↑11%
Sperrin Devenish	80	47	66%	33	59%	↑18	↑58%
UCHT	300	280	76%	20	93%	↓-12	↑44%
UU Coleraine Magee	40	2	2%	38	5%	↓-3	↓-7%
UU Jordanstown	50	14	36%	36	28%	↑8	↓-4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5000</b>	<b>3301</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>1689</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>↑77</b>	<b>↑ 19%</b>

## Branch 6-year growth trends, 2016-2021



The charts on this page show growth trends across branches from 2016 to 2021.

Patterns of growth or retraction over this period are also identified in the final column of Table 2, on page 12.



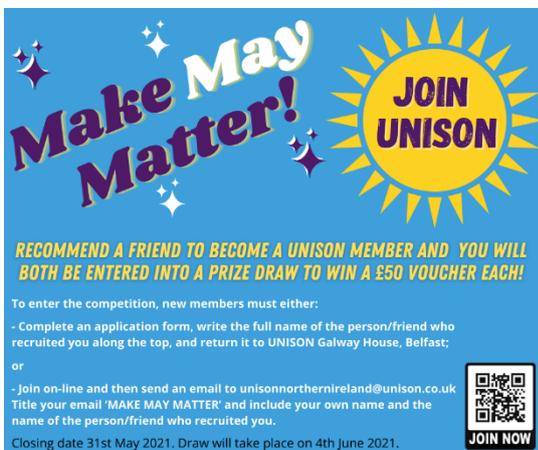
## Recruitment achievements across key sectors, employers and membership groups

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

54% (1757 new members) have been recruited in the **health & social services sector**, a marked increase from 43% during 2020, but similar to the 54% recruited in 2019. Recruitment primarily comes from the 5 large Health & Social Care Trusts with Belfast Trust the highest recruiting employer with 482 new joiners (15% of total recruitment). Issues of PPE, testing, workplace return, and job relocation have been major contributing reasons for joining during the pandemic.

Work is underway on the project:

- to identify the extent of replacement of directly employed health workers (such as the social care workforce and increasingly mental health services) by private, outsourced and third sector employment. The signs to date are worrying;
- to review the current state of health service workforce planning;
- to challenge inconsistency between the workforce figures held by the Department of Health and those held by the 6 Trusts.
- to determine what health service functions are now being replaced by the third sector or the private sector without recourse to proper procurement procedures.



At 12%, the proportion of new members (399) in the **education sector** has dropped considerably from 20% during 2020, and 15% in 2019. As expected, recruitment has

primarily come from within the Education Authority – with 9% of total recruitment to date. During 2020, Covid-related concerns were major contributing reasons for joining including issues of PPE, testing, schools' reopening and return to the workplace.

8% (246 new members) have been recruited in the **community & voluntary sector**, down from 9% during 2020,, but up from 6% in 2019. Inspire recorded the most new joiners (28).



Our membership in the sector continues to suffer from similar Covid-19 issues as are impacting on other sectors in addition to the additional pressure of ongoing funding cuts, with much more to come as a result of EU exit.

In the **private sector**, recruitment continues to be maintained at high levels with 27% of new joiners (872) coming from the sector. This includes private homecare, contractors and private nursing homes and is an increase from 26% during 2020, and 24% in 2019. Poor terms and conditions, particularly in homecare, continues to produce a higher than average attrition rate. Recruitment in the sector has primarily come from Four Seasons Healthcare with 64 new joiners this year.

It is very positive that the proportion of **young people** joining UNISON remains high with 774 new members in the year to date – 24% of total recruitment during the period. In total we have 3440 young people in full membership – 8% of the total. Our challenge remains to grow the next generation of union leaders.

During 2021, 82% of all new joiners are **women** (the same proportion as our overall full member breakdown). This is lower than the proportion of women (89%) recruited last year.

Table 3 - UNISON NI total recruitment by sector, employer and equality group, 1 Jan to 30 Sept 2021

Recruitment and membership by sector & highest recruiting employers	Recruitment		
	Jan-Sept 2021	Jan-Sept 2020	Total 2020
<b>Health and social services (excluding private)</b>	<b>1757 (54%)</b>	<b>1819 (42%)</b>	<b>2413 (43%)</b>
• Belfast HSC Trust	482	453	599
• South Eastern HSC Trust	311	334	410
• Southern HSC Trust	311	274	356
• Western HSC Trust	175	183	239
• Northern HSC Trust	168	222	284
• NIAS	54	50	64
<b>Higher education</b>	<b>26 (&lt;1%)</b>	<b>37 (&lt;1%)</b>	<b>42 (&lt;1%)</b>
<b>Education &amp; other NJC</b>	<b>399 (12%)</b>	<b>915 (21%)</b>	<b>1114 (20%)</b>
• Education Authority – Western	77	137	172
• Education Authority – Belfast	72	233	263
• Education Authority – South Eastern	68	139	167
• Education Authority – North Eastern	52	180	199
• Education Authority – Southern	25	73	81
<b>Community &amp; Voluntary</b>	<b>246 (8%)</b>	<b>485 (11%)</b>	<b>475 (9%)</b>
• Inspire	28	23	29
• Triangle Housing	19	25	32
• Apex	16	27	34
• Cedar Foundation	9	25	25
<b>Private sector (inc. homecare, contractors,</b>	<b>872 (27%)</b>	<b>1090 (25%)</b>	<b>1443 (26%)</b>
• Four Seasons Healthcare	64	79	93
• Kathryn Homes (Previously Runwood)	32	46	54
• Priory adult care services	31	32	41
• Healthcare Ireland Group	25	31	41
<b>(Young members – 26 and under)</b>	<b>774 (24%)</b>	<b>1053 (24%)</b>	<b>1352 (25%)</b>
<b>(Women)</b>	<b>2653 (82%)</b>	<b>3911 (90%)</b>	<b>4859 (89%)</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3248</b>	<b>4346</b>	<b>5487</b>

## Recruitment achievements across key occupational groups and job roles

Table 4 details recruitment within key occupational groups. It also highlights some of the occupations from which we have drawn the highest number of new recruits during 2021 to date. Key findings include:

- a marked increase in the proportion of nurses and health/nursing assistants joining (up from 22% in 2020 to 29% in 2021); and
- a marked decrease in the proportion of admin/P&T workers joining (down from 35% in 2020 to 29% in 2021). This decrease was mainly due to a reduction in the recruitment of classroom and nursery assistants (from 13% of total recruitment in 2020 to 8% in 2021)

Table 4 also shows that

- 942 new members (29% of all new joiners) work in admin/professional & technical roles across all sectors, a marked increase from 35% last year and 30% in 2019. 262 (8% of all new joiners) are classroom or nursery assistants; and 336 (10% of all new joiners) work in admin/clerical roles.
- 642 new members (29% of all new joiners) work in social service/social care roles. This includes 328 support workers (10% of all new joiners); 338 care assistants (10% of all new joiners); and 256 homecare workers across HSC Trusts and the private sector (8% of all new joiners).
- 941 new members (29% of all new joiners) work in nursing roles across all sectors. This is almost the same as the number recruited to this date last year (943) and a significant

increase in terms of the proportion recruited in 2020 (22%).

The 2021 number include 490 nurses (15% of all new joiners – and well up from the number recruited to date last year), and 271 health/nursing assistants (8% of all new joiners).

- 448 new members (14% of all new joiners) work in support services across all sectors. This includes 177 cleaners/domestics (5% of all new joiners), and 85 catering workers (4% of all new joiners).



Table 4 - UNISON NI total recruitment by key occupational group and job roles, 1 Jan to 30 Sept 2021

Occupational group and job roles	Recruitment		
	Jan-Sept 2021	Jan-Sept 2020	Total 2020
<b>Admin/P&amp;T – all sectors</b>	942 (29%)	1550 (36%)	1906 (35%)
• Classroom & Nursery Assts	262 (8%)	562 (13%)	656 (12%)
• Admin & Clerical	336 (10%)	507 (12%)	607 (11%)
<b>Social services/social care – all sectors</b>	642 (29%)	1306 (30%)	1706 (31%)
• Support Workers	328 (10%)	448 (10%)	594 (11%)
• Care Assistants	338 (10%)	395 (9%)	539 (10%)
• Homecare workers	256 (8%)	338 (8%)	430 (8%)
<b>Nursing – all sectors</b>	941 (29%)	943 (22%)	1193 (22%)
• Nurses	490 (15%)	472 (11%)	620 (11%)
• Health/Nursing Assistants	271 (8%)	265 (6%)	347 (6%)
<b>Support services – all sectors</b>	448 (14%)	547 (13%)	682 (12%)
• Cleaners/Domestics	177 (5%)	208 (5%)	254 (5%)
• Catering workers	85 (3%)	165 (4%)	204 (4%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3301</b>	<b>4346</b>	<b>5487</b>

## The success of our special recruitment and organising initiatives

We continue to progress recruitment and organising initiatives within specific sectors and occupational groups.

**Private homecare and nursing homes:** During 2021 we have continued special recruitment initiatives in sectors with a traditionally high turnover of staff such as private nursing homes and private homecare. Over previous years, recruitment in these areas was primarily supported by dedicated Fighting Fund Organisers who relied on physical face-to-face meetings with an often fragmented, dispersed and harder to organise workforce who have less direct access to a UNISON rep. With the end of the Fighting Fund, and the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, the recruitment and organising environment in these sectors has become increasingly difficult.

However, we continue to maximise recruitment in these areas using new communication platforms to distribute sector specific bargaining and policy updates on a regular basis. Organising staff have also continued to organise members meetings to establish networks across sectors and geographic areas and to support the election or re-election of stewards.



In private sector homecare, UNISON is the largest union and the potential for recruitment remains huge. Table 5 shows that in total, 136 new private homecare members have been recruited this year to date. This is a marked reduction from the numbers recruited during the period of Fighting Fund support, and the 260 recruited to this date last year. We now have a total of 1355 members in the sector across 30 companies.

Following Regional Council we will be bringing together the RMT, organising staff, and our 10 branches with private homecare members to review current progress on our homecare strategy and to discuss future organising, bargaining and campaigning activities. The current strategy is focused on halting further privatisation from the NHS to the private sector and returning privatised services back in house; and recruiting, organising, negotiating and securing recognition in the sector, company by company. Although homecare will always be best delivered by directly employed NHS staff, we have obligations to our members and workers in private homecare and all branches must ensure that they are properly serviced within our structures. This forms a key part of the current democratic review.

Similarly, UNISON is the largest union organising in the private nursing home sector, and the potential for recruitment is also huge with an estimated 20,000 staff working in hundreds of (mainly private sector) nursing and residential homes, primarily Four Seasons, Runwood, Brooklands and Priory.



Migrant workers continue to make up an increasing proportion of staff in these homes and recruiting and organising them remains a UNISON priority. Both EU nationals and other migrant workers continue to face major employment issues associated with their employment status, immigration policies, racism and discrimination. Table 5 shows that

to date 407 new members have been recruited in private nursing homes and residential settings this year and we now have a total of 3451 members in the sector, across 188 companies. However, overall, the migrant workforce appears to be reducing and we are undertaking work to understand the impact of both Brexit and the immigration laws.

Bespoke communications and recruitment materials; targeted telephone contact; the organisation of online member meetings; and the development of networks to identify key issues and potential new stewards have also been targeted at our members in education; doctors' surgeries, dentist surgeries, day-care settings and the increasing number of agency workers within the health sector. This has resulted in the recruitment of 42 new members in doctors' surgeries, dentist surgeries and private day-care setting this year. We now have a total of 239 members in doctors' surgeries across 102 employers; 73 members in dentist surgeries across 31 employers; and 172 members in private day-care settings across 81 employers. This work has been hampered by lockdowns.

**Student nurse recruitment:** Student nurse recruitment was a big success this year, despite the ongoing difficulties with delayed courses, staggered introductions, and the absence of the traditional freshers events. We have adapted to the new circumstances by running online sessions for new students about the benefits of joining UNISON and have also commenced physical recruitment events where possible. In September, UNISON recruitment information was contained in the UCAS email sent out to prospective nursing and social work students and this resulted in significant online recruitment. Physical recruitment events also took place in Queens and Magee resulting in a total of 168 new student nurses recruited this year – up from the 147 in the same period last year.

At the union-wide level, student nurse recruitment has been identified as a priority, along with the realisation that students who join unions at this stage of their career go on to remain members for long periods during the rest of their working lives. Led by Area Organiser Susan Neill, we have participated in a

union-wide project to identify the most positive, attractive route to engage student healthcare members in the face of competition from other unions. In total we have 597 student nurse members.

**Engaging with newly employed staff and former members:** Traditional induction sessions for new and returning public sector staff were postponed in March 2020. Branches and organising staff continue to identify new entry points, and opportunities for engagement and recruitment.

**Self-organised group recruitment** was again more limited this year due to the restrictions placed on SOG participation at branch recruitment events because of the pandemic. However, the Groups continue to support membership growth and retention through online communications linked to equality campaigns; the organisation of events; and raising UNISON’s profile in key bargaining, campaigning and policy areas.

**UNISON-wide recruitment initiatives:** The whole union downturn in growth since February 2021 and the difficulties in attracting new activists have prompted the establishment of a new UNISON-wide project focused on developing a co-ordinated organising and recruitment strategy. The Head of Organising and the Education Officer are members of the project steering group.

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

**Health & safety organising projects:** Details of the ‘Be on the safe side’ project is included under the ‘health & safety’ section of this report. Its primary goal is to maximise the health & safety information and support provided to members across all sectors during the pandemic. It also encompasses the ‘Be on the safe side’ health & safety steward recruitment campaign. In April we were also able to negotiate additional facility time with the Education Authority to undertake a project primarily focused on contacting members across the 6 education branches and using these contacts to identify potential activists to take up the role of health and safety rep and steward.

**Online joiners phonebank:** This project is led by the admin team and has involved telephone calls to over 2500 new online joiners this year alone. This is improving retention and is identifying key organising and bargaining issues.



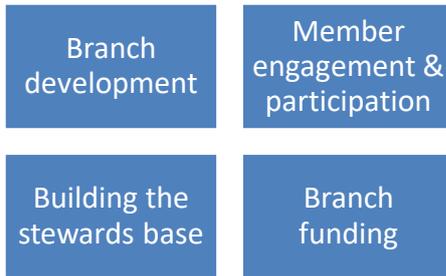
**The UNISON College as a recruitment tool:** The UNISON College continues to be a highly effective tool for engaging with members and non-members through online activist training, member learning and other initiatives.

Table 5 - UNISON NI special recruitment initiatives, 1 Jan to 30 Sept 2021

Recruitment initiatives	Recruitment			Total full members to Sept 2021	No. of employers to Sept 2021
	Jan-Sept 2021	Jan-Sept 2020	Total 2020		
Private homecare	136	260	327	1355	30
Private nursing homes & residential settings	407	469	666	3451	188
Doctors surgeries	25	61	67	239	102
Dentist surgeries	3	33	38	73	31
Day-care settings	14	40	61	172	81
Student nurses	168	147	175	597	/

# Building branch and workplace organisation

This section outlines progress on building branch and workplace organisation during 2021 in four key areas:



Since Regional Council 2020, the organising and administrative challenges faced by staff and activists have continued to include

- the closure of Galway House and the NW Support Centre;
- remote home-working;
- ongoing employer restrictions on movement across and between workplaces, strict social distancing measures, and cancellation of negotiating meetings and representations;
- ongoing restrictions on branch committee meetings, members' meetings and traditional core direct recruitment and organising activities.

Despite these challenges, branches have continued to function effectively with activists and the staff team prioritising member engagement and the democratic participation of the membership as key priorities during the pandemic. This success has only been possible through the willingness of branches to adopt new ways of doing business, including embracing new organising strategies and maximising their use of existing communication channels as well as new web-based communications solutions and social media platforms.

These innovations have helped to counter the impact of the pandemic on normal organising activities, and have ensured that our branches, activists and members continue to get the key information they need, and are actively engaged to participate in their union and branch decision making. Many branches have also invested in new IT and other equipment for stewards and branch officers.

As a result, branch committee meetings, members meetings, negotiations, representations and AGMs have been able to take place online with a view to increased face-to-face (or hybrid online/physical) engagement as restrictions ease.

The UNISON College has also continued to offer our education programme using innovative online solutions (see 'the UNISON College' in the next section) but has plans in place to move to more face-to-face delivery when circumstances permit.



From July, the organising team has been working with branches to identify opportunities to re-engage with members and activists in face-to-face settings when government, employer and UNISON guidance allows. These opportunities have included the use of outdoor 'member engagement' stalls on employer sites, physical student nurse recruitment events, and the organisation of hybrid physical/online joint branch assessments at external venues between September and December. Regional Council will also take place as a physical event. These events will only take place according to current legislation and the risk assessments developed by UNISON and the relevant employers and/or venues.

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

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

## ■ Branch development

**Preparing for the future - The Review of the democratic participation of our members.** This Review has been ongoing since 2019 with oversight delegated to the Democratic Participation Review Group. It is taking place in the form of a number of projects examining key areas of our democratic activity at regional, branch and workplace level. These projects are jointly led by members of the Branch Development Group and UNISON staff and are outlined at the end of this section. From the outset of the Review, Regional Committee has been anxious to ensure that the particular needs of members, branches and lay structures in NI are given the fullest consideration.

As reported previously, the 1<sup>st</sup> stage of the Review was completed in 2020 and included a major attitudinal survey of our membership and activist base. Although significant progress on the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage of the Review continues to be delayed due to the pandemic, the Branch Development Group (BDG) met in January 2021 and reconfirmed the key UNISON policy, guidance and principles that would underpin future discussions with branch committees and lay structures.

Core to these remain the principles of UNISON democracy and the democratic participation of our members as protected and promoted by the UNISON Rule Book and Code of Good Branch Practice. The BDG also reconfirmed that UNISON NI Regional Council Resolutions and Regional Committee decisions have established the scope of the review and the issues that require detailed discussion. In particular:

- the need to assess our current structures, organisation and allocation of resources and to explore what we can do differently, and what we can do better to prepare for the future;
- recognition that change in our lay structures is needed to ensure that all UNISON members have an equal opportunity to participate and to benefit from collective bargaining; and that particular attention needs to be paid to the over one-third of members now working outside of the public sector;

- the need to explore potential for the creation of new UNISON sector and/or employer specific branches to ensure that members outside the public service enjoy the same rights to representation, participation and collective bargaining as those members within the public service.



The Review to date has already recognised the need for different approaches to branch organisation, including the potential for more partnership engagement with the staff team and new branch structures to maximise branch effectiveness and democratic participation and is expected to culminate in new models of organising and decision-making - all geared to ensuring that the most important people – our members – have much more involvement in the work of the union. Developments in the key Review projects are detailed below:

**Project 1 - Member attitudes to support & services received:** Detailed analysis continues to take place on current membership, recruitment and growth trends as well as the extensive data provided from the 3300 members, current and former activists who responded to the online survey. This provided important information on member satisfaction; engagement; participation at workplace, branch and regional level; as well as the key challenges/barriers facing activists in their role. We are feeding this information through to the UNISON-wide review of recruitment and organising.

**Project 2 - Overall state of branch development & organisation:** The joint branch assessment process remains an important forum for building a picture on the overall state of branch development and organisation in each branch. The most important indicators of branch health will continue to include levels of member participation; stewards identification

recruitment and participation; the filling of core posts on branch committees; the full application of proportionality and fair representation and robust branch finances.



**Projects 3 & 4 – Member participation / Democratic structure & function of branches:**

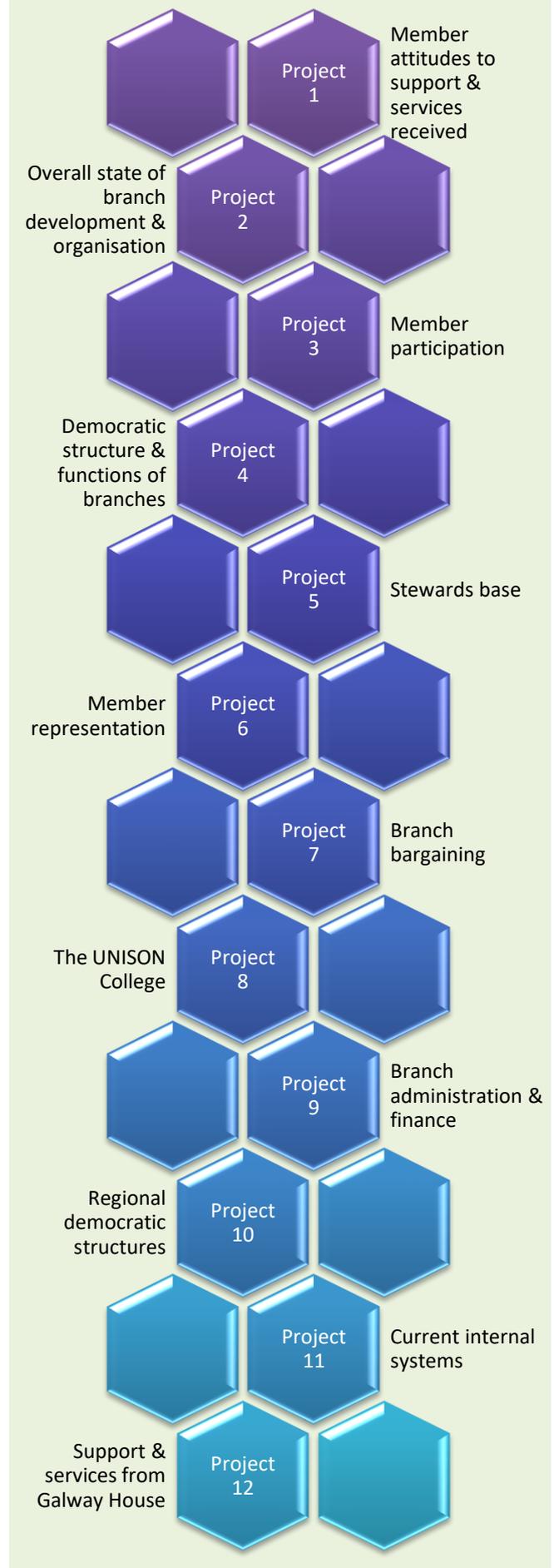
Our response to member engagement during the pandemic continues to build a picture of the barriers faced by our members working outside the large, established workplaces; our members concentrated in hundreds of small workplaces – public and private; and our members living and working in rural settings. Phase 2 will continue to explore these barriers to democratic participation as well as reviewing current branch rules; branch boundaries and internal structures; branch committee composition, roles and functions; AGMs and branch elections; self-organisation; and the election, role and function of branch officers.

**Project 5 - Stewards base:** The stagnation in the number of new stewards coming forward has been recognised as a major issue of concern across the union. This project is reviewing the stewards base in NI, and will develop proposals to revitalise steward identification, recruitment and training. A particular focus will be maximising workplace members meetings as key to democratic participation and stewards elections.

**Project 6 – Member representation:** The collection of data on representation at branch and regional level continues.

**Project 7 – Branch bargaining:** Despite the pandemic our branch based bargainers continue to undertake intensive work and this review will explore all aspects of current activity including the skills and training of our activists; employer negotiating structures and procedures; and member participation in the negotiating process.

**Fig 7. The Review Projects**



**Project 8 - The UNISON College:** This project is reviewing all aspects of regional and branch activity with regards to education including barriers to participation and the impact of the pandemic on course content, delivery communications and outreach.

**Project 9 - Branch administration and finance:**

This review of branch administration and finance continues alongside the NEC branch resources review and review of the code of good branch practice. As agreed at the branch consultation session on the BRR proposals, meetings with individual branch committees will commence before the end of the year.

**Project 10 – Regional democratic structures:**

Following Regional Council the review group will commence engagement with each lay structure to assess their ability to accommodate the needs of our changing membership base.

**Project 11: Internal systems / Support and services from Galway House:** Internal projects, including the development of member resources in the Belfast and NW centres, associated with this Review continue and are led by the Regional Management Team, line managers and directly involve all staff.

**Joint branch assessments, activity-based budgets and their implementation:** The majority of joint branch assessments between September and December 2021 are scheduled to take place physically in external, risk-assessed venues.

These sessions continue to be supported by our RMS and organising staff who work in partnership with branch teams to ensure that the joint branch assessment process (supported by the online Organising Framework) is an effective decision-making Forum for building branch and workplace organisation. The regional support programme offered by Regional Committee to branches includes:

- using our regional databases to create up to date pictures of the members, structures and democratic participation in each branch;
- ensuring that every committee member knows how branch finance operates –

including the general branch management of funds and budgeting; and

- 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 plans only work if they are translated into core agenda items at monthly branch committee meetings and activity is measured. The extent that this is happening continues to be assessed as part of the Stage 2 Democratic Review and includes data collection on agendas, minutes, attendance records and some additional information from branch committee members on the support needed from the centre.



**Regional Pool:** The Regional Pool will be used to support branch, cross-branch and region-wide recruitment and organising initiatives between now and the establishment of the branch organising fund. During 2021 Regional Committee agreed significant spend from the Pool on the ‘Free school meals for all’ campaign; ‘All we need is lunch’ art competition; student nurse and other recruitment initiatives. The joint branch assessments and finance discussions will enable branches to prepare bids for the Pool.

**Campaign Fund:** Following Council, Regional Committee will prepare a bid to support our programme of political campaigning, including our priorities for the 2022 Assembly elections.

Although still delayed by Covid, the theme for our next Jonathan Swallow memorial event will be on the challenge of the increasing privatisation of health services in all aspects including private medicine; privatisation of nursing, social care, mental health and other core services and the growing lack of accountability by those in charge.

There are still opportunities for branches to bid to the campaign fund. Bids are assessed by the Regional Implementation Group according to strict NEC criteria, must take account of the union’s campaign priorities and will primarily involve expenditure of a clearly political nature. This may include campaigns, lobbying, research or other activities:

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

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

- campaigns that directly involve members and highlight the value of specific public

services such as school meals, and the contribution of support staff to the healthcare team. Such projects could also involve local communities;

- projects on strengthening the knowledge and values of trade unionism, including uncovering local trade union history and women’s history;
- projects which enable the development of self-organisation on a cross-branch or geographical basis;
- projects which use solidarity campaigns to strengthen awareness of trade union values.

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

## ■ Branch development – Measuring organising success

Recruitment & organising	Branch and workplace organisation	Member participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Success in meeting annual recruitment targets?</li> <li>• Growth in full membership?</li> <li>• Development of a detailed recruitment &amp; organising plan linked to branch and regional campaigns?</li> <li>• Direct involvement of members in branch and regional campaigns and bargaining around workplace issues?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Branch compliance with the UNISON rule book, protocols and financial compliance?</li> <li>• An effective network of elected, trained and active stewards and H&amp;S reps across departments and workplaces that meets proportionality and fair representation rules?</li> <li>• An active, trained and effective branch committee with all core posts filled?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation at workplace level, in collective action and all aspects of branch and regional life?</li> <li>• Participation in UNISON structures, conferences, seminars, training and campaigns?</li> <li>• Participation in branch decision-making through regular members meetings, effective branch communications, elections and AGM processes?</li> </ul>

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

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.

The table shows that:

- The vast majority of branches have *paid release* resources available;
- all branches completed their yearly *joint branch assessment* between September to December 2020, were mapped online to facilitate informed decision-making, and submitted the associated online organising framework prior to the April deadline;
- branch participation in *online communications activity* remains high;
- all branches are either in *membership growth* or limited retraction with the potential to move into growth by year end;
- The number of *new stewards* currently being identified, elected and trained remains below target. The difficulty in identifying and electing new reps during

the pandemic is a recognised challenge across the union and is core issue for both the UNISON NI Democratic Review and the HQ led review of recruitment and organising. In addition to increasing the pressure on the existing base, some branches are also facing difficulties in filling core branch posts;

- 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 and recorded including decisions relating to budgets, income and expenditure;
- compliance with UNISON financial rules and protocols is represented in Table 6 by whether *financial returns* were submitted on time.

Table 6 - Branch development indicators, 2020/21

Branch	Paid release	JBA	Active online	Mapped	Growth during 2021	New stewards elected from Oct 2020		Stewards ERA trained Oct 2020 to present		Branch minutes on File?	Submit Financial return on time
						F	M	F	M		
Belfast City Hospital	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↓-14	0	1	0	1	Yes	Yes
Belfast Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑6	5	0	0	0	Yes	Yes
Causeway	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↓-7	0	1	0	0	Yes	Yes
Community & Vol	A&W	Yes	Yes	Online	↓-13	2	4	3	0	Yes	Yes
Craigavon Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	0	3	0	3	0	Yes	Yes
Derry Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑14	1	1	1	0	Yes	Yes
Down & Lisburn	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑27	6	2	5	0	Yes	Yes
Down Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↓-7	2	1	3	0	Yes	Yes
Foyle Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↓-50	3	0	0	1	Yes	Yes
Greenpark Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑13	2	0	0	1	No	Yes
Health Agencies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↓-2	3	1	1	0	Yes	Yes
Mater Hospital	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↓-29	1	1	0	0	Yes	Yes
N & W Belfast	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑28	1	1	2	0	No	Yes
NE Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↓-19	4	0	2	0	Yes	Yes
Newry & Mourne	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑2	0	0	1	0	Yes	Yes
NI Ambulance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↓-12	0	2	0	2	Yes	Yes
NI Blood Transfusion	A&W	Yes	Yes	Online	0	1	0	2	0	Yes	Yes
Northern Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↓-53	2	4	0	1	Yes	Yes
Omagh & Fermanagh	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↓-18	1	0	0	2	Yes	Yes
Orchard H&SC	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑73	2	0	0	1	Yes	Yes
Rathgael	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↓-1	0	0	0	0	Yes	Yes
RVH & Muckamore	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑53	3	5	0	2	Yes	Yes
S & E Belfast	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑24	1	2	1	2	Yes	Yes
Southern Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↓-12	0	0	0	0	Yes	Yes
Sperrin & Devenish	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↑18	0	1	0	2	Yes	Yes
UCHT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	↓-12	4	4	1	1	Yes	Yes
UU Coleraine	A&W	Yes	No	Online	↓-3	0	2	0	0	Yes	Yes
UU Jordanstown	A&W	Yes	No	Online	↑8	0	1	0	1	Yes	Yes

**Measuring branch participation:** As can be seen from Table 7, branch participation in those areas required by Rule remains high, but as noted in the previous section many branches continue to face difficulties in recruiting more stewards and filling all branch posts. As a result, participation is confined to a relatively small group of activists and can mask workload and participation problems faced by many branch committees. Solutions to these issues will result from the Stage 2 Review exercise.

The number of online activities organised by branches, the region, partner organisations, self-organised groups, solidarity groups and ICTU significantly increased in 2021. Consequently, many more members and

branch activists had the opportunity to engage. The school meals campaign and One Team 2k campaign are the first physical UNISON events which gave members and activists the opportunity to take part. Individual members also took part in other physical events such as the Black Lives Matter protests and the protests in support of Gaza.

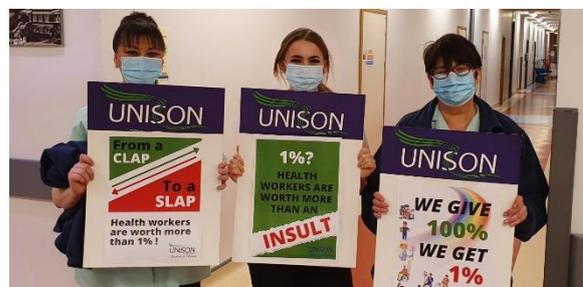


Table 7- Branch participation, 2020/21

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

## ■ Membership participation and building the stewards base

**Annual General Meetings:** In October 2020 the NEC confirmed that branch AGMs would proceed as normal between January and March 2021 to ensure member participation in branch democracy. To facilitate this process, the NEC permitted the use of virtual AGMs but continued to require that normal AGM business be conducted, including a financial report, presentation of the branch accounts, and election of branch officers.

Following this decision, Regional Committee instigated a programme of staff support to branches including the extension of the 2020 AGM online pilot; support and training from the UNISON College NI; and support from staff on all aspects of the AGM process including social media outreach and publicity prior to the AGM.



Although many branches faced challenges meeting their quorums and filling committee posts, Regional Committee ruled that all branches had met the core democratic requirements placed on them by the NEC.

In doing so Regional Committee recognised that the 2021 AGMs took place at an unprecedented time due to the pandemic and commended all branches and activists for the extraordinary efforts they put into maximising member engagement and participation despite the increasing work pressures and strain they are under.

As part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage of the Review of democratic participation, Regional Committee recommended a year-long programme of action to support branches where democratic deficits have been identified. This support will include:

- discussions with the relevant branches with information on the issues identified and the support plan available;
- a partnership between the branch, staff team and BDG to tackle the issues

identified - for example, filling vacant posts, and maximising proportionality and fair representation by encouraging the participation of specific under-represented occupations, sectors, employers and groups.

The Regional Committee is committed to supporting branches to fill gaps through a new membership survey currently being prepared.

**Direct member engagement:** Throughout 2021, branches and the regional centre have continued to engage extensively with members and ensure their democratic participation in the union. Examples include:

- thousands of phone calls with new joiners and UNISON members in specific sectors;
- significant use of online platforms to facilitate member representations and workplace meetings;
- tens of thousands of newsletters and surveys sent to specific groups of members on Covid-19, health & safety and other key issues;
- nearly 7000 members contacted by email and post to participate in the Local Government pay ballot consultation;
- hundreds of meetings and briefings 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;
- 13,060 followers on Facebook, 2,160,996 people viewing our Facebook posts, and nearly 215,362 actively engaging with likes, comments & shares;
- 44,907 views on the UNISON NI website;
- 3,608 followers on twitter, with 26,112 viewing our twitter feeds;
- almost 2000 participants on the online UNISON College education programme;
- thousands of people accessing UNISON NI webinars, video content & films on health & safety & other campaigns.

All staff participate in these activities with special support provided by the Communications Assistant.

Branches also continue to take advantage of the bulk emailing system and the text messaging services available from the Regional Centre.

**Recognising our own heroes:** We have commenced a project to create a written and visual record of the everyday struggles UNISON members have been through during the pandemic. Branches, in partnership with the staff organising team, will be asked to publicise the project to members; invite nominations; capture all the stories for publication; and choose one or two special examples to be highlighted in an accompanying video. Branches will then be encouraged to come together to host events (when Covid regulations make this possible) to celebrate the achievement of our members. This project is capable of being jointly resourced through both branch resources and the Regional Pool.

**Steward base:** The pandemic has demonstrated both the importance and challenge of identifying, electing, training and supporting as many members as possible to take on the core role of UNISON steward across all groups, areas and workplaces. This challenge has been identified across the union with growth in membership since 2017 not replicated in the number of new activists stepping forward.

A specific project has been set up to develop a unionwide organising and recruitment strategy to meet the changing demands of the union including the revitalisation of activist identification, recruitment and training and this will run in tandem with our own Review which will bring forward recommendations:

- to develop our stewards training programme;
- to increase activity and develop new stewards within branches;
- to maximise democratic participation through the stewards' election process;

- to increase our base and fill gaps to ensure proportionality and fair representation;
- to develop new approaches to support new stewards and mitigate the work-life balance challenges and childcare barriers faced by many of our women members.

**Get elected:** The "Get Elected" campaign will be re-run between October and December 2021, with each branch working to a programme with organising staff to encourage members to stand for election as local shop stewards. Special emphasis will be placed on the need for more women, more black and minority ethnic stewards, and more young people in all categories. Despite the pandemic challenges, and the associated restrictions on face-to-face member contact, the regional organising team have continued to support branches to initiate a series of online members' meetings to support the election or re-election of stewards. These were particularly useful in the run up to the 2021 AGMs and will continue until such time that physical meetings can also resume in the normal way.



The combined figure of stewards and contacts is 990 and has not kept pace with the growth in membership. The number of workplace stewards (and the majority of branch posts) is not proportionate with the overall women membership and remains the single biggest issue for development in 2021/22.

As detailed previously, the branch development group will now assist branches to improve proportionality and fair representation by further sharing of posts, and further development of a number of core posts.

Table 8: Proportionality by activist post- 2021

Activist Position	Total 2021	Women 2021	Men 2021	Total 2020	Women 2020	Men 2020
Branch Secretaries	46	61%	39%	44	64%	36%
Branch Chairs	39	72%	28%	41	63%	37%
Branch Treasurers	51	67%	33%	54	72%	28%
Other Branch Posts	143	52%	48%	134	54%	46%
Workplace Stewards	517	62%	38%	467	64%	36%
Contacts	194	87%	13%	194	88%	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>990</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>934</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>32%</b>

■ **Branch funding**

**Branch Resources Review:** In June the special delegate conference voted in support of the review. At the core of the proposals is a shift in resources towards branches by:

- improving support and services to branches;
- an improved funding scheme that supports branches under financial pressure and recognises today’s public service reality of fragmented employers;
- the creation of a new Branch Support and Organising Fund to get additional and varied resources closer to branches, and grow the union.

We await further details on the support and organising fund which has been the subject of positive action to ensure that we, as the smallest region of UNISON, are given a fair share of the resource.

Regional Committee has encouraged branches to achieve the proposed branch reserve figure by further investment in the members, more

organising initiatives, upskilling current reps where needed, and upgrading branch equipment including IT. Support will be available from the Regional Pool where needed. Joint Convenors and NEC members are determined to ensure that the region is represented in the next stage of development of the branch fund.

During the current pandemic, we continue to monitor employers to ensure that their payroll systems continue to collect union subs and that membership applications are processed. These are centralised functions in NI.

**Income:** Total income returned to Head Office increased to £4,919,812.72. This represents a 12% increase on the previous year. Total income returned to branches for 2020 increased to £1,280,196. This represents a 16% increase on the previous year.



# Participation & Structures

## Proportionality and fair representation and operation of UNISON NI structures

The gender distribution of our membership in NI is 82% women for 2021 and the Constitution of **Regional Council** ensures proportionality. Branches and other lay structures fully co-operate to ensure that delegates are proportional on the basis of gender. Self-organised groups and specialist groups participate. Branch attendance at the online 2020 Council was 96%. The proportion of women delegates rose to 77%.

The **Regional Committee** has met online 4 times since last Regional Council. The Committee currently has 38 members and its composition stands at 74% women. All meetings were quorate. The agenda was dominated by progress on union building, our response to the Covid-19 pandemic, EU exit,

and our delivery of UNISON’s core objectives and priorities in all four main areas of work.



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	Regional pool group	Regional implementation group (& Campaign Fund)
Gabrielle Carton James Large Margaret McKee Alastair Long Gillian Foley* Catherine McKenna** Aine Brennan Kevin Hillick Marjorie Trimble <i>*To June 2021 **From June 2021</i>	Gabrielle Carton James Large Anne Taggart Maura McKenna Deborah Yapicioz <i>Representatives from Branch Education Officers, ULRs, lay tutors</i>	Gabrielle Carton James Large Margaret McKee Alastair Long Gillian Foley* Catherine McKenna** Jean Getty Fiona Kelly Anne Taggart	Gabrielle Carton James Large Margaret McKee Gillian Foley* Catherine McKenna** Alastair Long

Our joint **Regional Convenors**, Gabrielle Carton and James Large presided over all formal meetings of our regional lay structures and a series of important engagements with NEC on a union-wide basis and with other regions. Both have been active in securing commitments on resources, the development of the Campaign Fund, arrangements with the centre on handling political devolution, and working groups established by the NEC to take forward key resource issues.

Gabrielle Carton retired from work in September 2021 and Regional Council will be her last formal engagement as Joint Regional Convenor. At its September meeting, Regional Committee paid tribute to the tremendous contribution that she has made to our union and Regional Council will also have the opportunity to mark it.

In June 2021, Margaret McKee, Alastair Long and Catherine McKenna were elected as the **NEC members for NI**.

The **Regional Implementation Group** comprises the Joint Convenors and three NEC members for NI, working in partnership with the Regional Secretary. The Group oversees implementation of Regional Committee and NEC policy between meetings of the Regional Council. The Group also has responsibility for

decisions on local applications to the Campaign Fund and carries out a Standing Orders function for Regional Council.

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

## Self-organised and special issue groups

### 'Giving voice to tackling disadvantage and combating discrimination'

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

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

#### ■ Women's Committee

The Women's Committee has 52 members from 25 branches. During 2021 it has held 4 online meetings and members have participated in a wide range of organising and campaigning activity. Deborah Yapicioz and Anne McVicker are joint Chairs.

**Participation:** Work has progressed to develop local women's committees within the Western, Northern, Belfast and Southern Trust areas. Every NI branch has participated in Committee events this year, with Committee members continuing to organise additional local events and branch campaigns.



**Work programme:** The Committee's 2021 Work programme includes:

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

- ongoing campaigning for reform of legislation on reproductive rights, including abortion;
- highlighting the disproportionate impact of austerity on women - supporting gender budgeting and reflecting our demands on the bargaining agenda;
- campaigning for a comprehensive, affordable childcare strategy in policy and in practice through bargaining;
- ensuring that the bargaining agenda reflects women's health needs;
- promoting the WASPI women's pension campaign;
- supporting the Violence against Women and Girls Strategy;
- campaigning for misogyny to be recognised as a hate crime;
- promoting relationships and sexuality education in schools (RSE);
- solidarity with women internationally.

**Menopause policy** - UNISON has worked with the Education Authority to produce the very first menopause policy. This was launched on International Women's Day in March 2021 and very recently won the CIPD NI HR award for best inclusion and diversity initiative. We have approached all teaching unions for support to raise awareness, promote diversity in the

workplace and ensure that all staff in schools and other educational settings have access to the policy. It is essential that unions (alongside employers) lead the way in removing any old-fashioned stigmas about the menopause and treat it sympathetically as they would any other health issue.

**16 days of action to end violence against women:** To mark international 'End violence against women and girls' day, the Committee hosted an online event 'Normal was never good enough', where they discussed domestic abuse as a workplace issue.



More than 1 in 5 employed women are experiencing domestic abuse. The Committee has established a working group to identify which employers have a domestic abuse policy in place. Training will be developed on how to support members experiencing domestic abuse.

Following the work by UNISON and the EA on developing a domestic violence policy, we negotiated training for managers and union stewards. Six stewards from each of our branches have attended the training which was delivered by Women's Aid. UNISON is also negotiating with the EA in relation to paid time off for members affected by domestic violence.

**Conferences and committees:** The theme of the 2021 UNISON Women's Conference was "Empowering women in UNISON – lives!" and took place online in February. Anne McVicker, Joint Chair of the NI and national Women's Committee was a guest speaker at the session on getting women into political influencing roles. Deborah Yapicioz is now vice-chair of the national women's committee.

UNISON women members are represented on the **ICTU Women's Committee** by Deborah Yapicioz and Danielle McCusker, who was recently elected as the Vice Chair.

Patricia McKeown and Anne Speed from ICTU Executive and Danielle McCusker attended the virtual **TU Women's Council of the Isles** hosted by the Scottish TUC in February 2021. The next Women's Council of the Isles is scheduled for November 2021.

**International Women's Day:** The theme of this year's IWD was 'Phenomenal Women' who have made an impact on society during the pandemic and beyond. Deborah Yapicioz spoke at a virtual event that took place on 6<sup>th</sup> March focusing on those women in NI who work in the Health and Social Care system, both within the NHS and those in the Independent Sector, and the need for change – better pay, terms and conditions, childcare and flexibility.

The Committee also held an online event on the evening of 10 March entitled 'A Celebration of Women'. The theme also included a woman's covid journey in health (presented by Deborah Yapicioz), in education (presented by Anne Taggart and Catherine McKenna) and in the community & voluntary sector (presented by Anne McVicker and Helen Crickard). Entertainment was provided by musician Ursula Burns 'Dangerous Harpist', and stand-up comedians Emer Maguire and Fidelma Carolan.

The Regional Secretary, spoke at an ICTU IWD event, 'Leadership, women and change – in work, in society and in trade unions'. The event covered how women are bringing about change in trade unions, work and in society.



**WASPI:** Good news for WASPI women from the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman who has found that the Department of Work and Pensions took too long to respond once it knew a significant proportion of women born in the 1950s were unaware of the changes to their state pension age following legislation introduced by Parliament from 1995. 3.8 million women in the UK were affected by these changes, with nearly 5,000 UNISON women members in NI affected.

The Committee WASPI group took a lead role in campaigning and raising awareness on this issue by running workshops and encouraging our members to send thousands of complaint letters to the DWP along with other WASPI women across the UK. Well done to the Committee activists who kept branches updated, ran the workshops, marched in rallies, spoke to elected members, took part in radio and TV interviews to raise awareness, and stood outside the high courts at the various Judicial Reviews.

**Violence against women and girls strategy:** NI is the only part of the UK that does not have a specific strategy dedicated to tackling gender-based violence to help bring an end to violence against women and girls. The Committee is calling on the Assembly to act and develop a strategy that brings NI in line with the rest of the UK and is part of an alliance of women's organisations.



**Make Misogyny a Hate Crime** - Hate crime legislation in NI is linked to sectarianism, racism and homophobia. The Committee, with sister organisations, is calling for misogyny to be added to the legislation. This means that when a woman is a victim of a crime such as assault or harassment because

she is a woman, the law will recognise that. Make Misogyny History!

**Relationship, Sexuality Education (RSE):** We support the 'Raise your voice' campaign calling for comprehensive, statutory, standardised relationships & sexuality education (RSE) in all schools in NI. This will ensure that young people will embark on healthy and safe adult relationships.

**End Femicide in Turkey Campaign:** An open letter was sent from UNISON to express our outrage of the ongoing treatment of women in Turkey with 250 women murdered this year alone as well as many reported rapes and sexual assaults. We supported the campaign to end femicide in Turkey and around the world. Committee members attended UNISON's international webinar, "The struggle for human and workers' rights in Turkey".



**Abortion:** We are part of the Alliance for Choice campaign calling for implementation of the legislation. Most recently, we contributed to the billboard campaign and are sad to report that the billboards were vandalised by opponents.

Committee members attended the relaunch of the Feminist Recovery Plan produced by the Women's Policy Group. The Plan is endorsed by Regional Committee and presented as motions to UNISON and ICTU conferences.

Rachel Killen, Committee member from Newry & Mourne branch took part in the ICTU Women in Leadership Course and Committee members attended a "Writing effective motions" course in September to assist with future conferences.

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

## ■ LGBT+ Group

The LGBT+ Group met online 4 times during 2021 to receive briefings on current issues. Whilst it has 142 registered members representing 26 branches across NI, attendance at meetings remains low and the Group will continue to undertake outreach with the wider membership list to increase participation.

Activities to encourage LGBT+ members to join the Group have included a social media campaign and promotion to colleagues in the workplace. The Group has also made use of Doodle Polls to find out the best time to hold their meetings to increase the number of people able to attend.

**2021 Pride events:** Due to pandemic restrictions both Belfast Pride and Foyle Pride events took place virtually in August. However, Mid-Ulster Pride and the first ever Omagh Pride had physical parades in September. Members of the Group have been involved in organising virtual events which were shared via social media. Martin McConnellogue, Joint Chair, represents UNISON on the Foyle Pride committee and has played a significant role in increasing our

contribution to the LGBT+ community in the North West.

On 25<sup>th</sup> August, Foyle Pride in partnership with UNISON premiered 'Different Journeys' a documentary on the journeys travelled within the LGBT+ community in Foyle. It was followed with Q&A session with the Regional Secretary and Martin on the panel. The forum is planning to hold a virtual event to share the 'Different Journeys' video later in the year, given the success it has had online.



**UNISON LGBT+ Conference:** Due to COVID restrictions the LGBT+ Conference was cancelled and replaced with LGBT+ Live! The 3 day event had sessions on Digital Organising for LGBT+ Equality, how to be a trans ally, and Pride in Procurement.

## ■ Disability Group

The Disability Group has met 3 times since last Regional Council. Branch participation has increased over the last year and we continue to encourage branches to take up their full entitlement to 2 reps.

**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 on Regional Committee by Marjorie Trimble. The National Disability Conference will be held physically this year in Liverpool from 30<sup>th</sup> October to 1<sup>st</sup> November. Regional delegates and branch delegates from NI will be in attendance.

**Workplan:** The key elements for 2021/22 are:

- assessing employer Disability Action Plans across the public sector in the key areas of selection, recruitment and training;



- ensuring that disabled people are central to the rebuild and redesign of our health services;
- campaigning on mental health issues in the workplace including raising the profile of the impact of mental health on workers, and the need for employers to have relevant policies to support staff;
- campaigning for the use of disability passports;
- raising awareness of the Access to Work (NI) scheme that provides advice, support and financial assistance to people with disabilities to take up employment or who are in work and experience difficulties related to their disability.

**Response to Covid-19:** As reported last year, a survey of the experience of UNISON disabled workers during the pandemic found that over half of members worked from home, with around three quarters stating that they were more productive or just as productive to being in the workplace. The report recommended a new enforceable

right to home working for disabled workers who want it and the increased efficiency of Access to Work. We are discussing these issues with public sector equality units and preparing a political campaign seeking the enforceable right to homeworking.

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

## ■ Black and Migrant Workers' Group

**Participation and membership trends:** By increasing its online activities over the past year, the Group has been able to reach new audiences across NI and increase its membership markedly. This has also corresponded with an increasing number of new B&MW stewards.

New black and migrant workers comprised 15% of all new online joiners between March to August 2021. This partly illustrates the high level of recruitment of overseas staff by Health Trusts and private nursing homes, but also the visibility and relevance of UNISON as a source of support for newly arrived black and migrant workers.

As a result, our B&MW membership is changing. We have more members who were recruited from Africa, as well as more black members originally from here or from GB. We also have a high number of people on work permits joining us. For over a decade, healthcare employers were recruiting in Europe and most of our non-European members had already settled (generally via British citizenship).

However, in the post Brexit context, there is no longer any European recruitment without a work permit, and recruitment drives tend to focus on countries further afield where people are educated in English. All new staff are therefore being recruited via work visas with all the difficulties, exorbitant costs associated with any immigration process, and huge potential for exploitation that come along with the work permit system. We are currently running a survey of our B&MW members and interim results show that over a third of respondents are on a work permit.

This means that the issue of **access to immigration advice and representation** is more relevant now than at any point in the last 10 years. The deadline for EUSS applications for European members will also add to the need for access to immediate support for people who did not apply and had not realised the significance of the EU Settlement requirements.

Cases have already started to come in with members dismissed because they face issues with their right to work. Yet we have no way of referring members on, as our legal advice does not cover immigration beyond advice to the member through a weekly immigration helpline. This is the subject of a motion from the Group to Regional Council.



**Black members and racism in the workplace:** Our group has identified race discrimination at work and the lack of promotions for black members as two key areas of work for the coming year. Issues of racism and race discrimination have been high on the agenda in the past 18 months inside and outside UNISON. We will hold an updating session for branches on UNISON's race protocol.

The level of online activities around anti-racism and black community activism in the last two years has been unprecedented. It is recognised that more needs to be done to ensure that black members are elected to

both workplace and branch positions so that our members have confidence that their voice is being heard in UNISON lay structures.

**Committees, conferences and events:** As a result of the pandemic, the Black members conference was replaced by online debates and workshops and this offered the opportunity for 23 UNISON NI participants to register, instead of the handful of members who usually travel to GB every year.



**Communications:** The group has been using online platforms and WhatsApp group chats throughout the pandemic. We have continued to send e bulletins after formal meetings to all B&MW members in our region to share events and news of particular interest to members living and working here. We are also currently running a B&MW survey to update our data and identify priority issues.

**Wider union activities and work with other BME networks organisations:** Our group continues to be represented on the NI Assembly's All Party Group on Ethnic Minorities coordinated by Patrick Yu. We have also co-operated on events being organised centrally around anti-racism, the effect of Covid on black members, and the anti-racism international day event.

We continue to work via online platforms and zoom events to welcome new members and encourage others to join. During the year the Group worked with branches to hold welcome events for B&MW workers in several Trusts. Several members of the Group took part in a training course with 'Hope not Hate' as a taster session, and the module will be included in this Autumn's education programme.

In May our Group took part in a series of events coordinated by ICTU as part of their May Day programme of activities. There were several workshops focussing on tackling discrimination in the workplace. These events were important in terms of information sharing on the day, as well as in terms of the visibility of our union in the BAME community sector and amongst newly arrived migrant members. We have also worked closely in particular with ICTU, Migrant Centre NI and with City of Sanctuary and NICRE throughout the year.

Our Group contributed to UNISON's submission to the NI Affairs Committee on the 'experiences and challenges of minority ethnic and migrant people living in NI' and gave oral evidence to the Committee in September. The Committee were keen to hear about experiences of discrimination in the workplace and we used the opportunity to highlight the issue of immigration fees, unfair surcharges, and the potential for exploitation that comes with work permits.

**Black Lives Matter:** Although we could not formally take part in the BLM demonstrations because of Covid restrictions, individual members did participate. We reported last year that we were part of the campaign demanding that PSNI withdraw the fines and reimburse. We are pleased to report that this has now happened, and we continue to lobby for the application of equality and human rights to black and migrant communities and workers in the provision of all public services including the policing and justice system.

**Immigration advice clinic:** Our main campaign internally continues to be the demand for access to immigration advice and representation through our UNISON solicitors. During lockdown our immigration advice clinics moved to a remote 'as and when' contact with the immigration solicitor. This has not been ideal and did not add much to the already existing UNISON direct service. These services continue to be very useful for general immigration advice, but they are not a substitute for the need to be able to access full support when facing a work-related immigration issue.

**Advice clinics:** All advice provision has been done remotely since last regional council. The Migrant Centre NI EUSS advisers continued to be available for referrals for our members. EUSS advice services will continue until March 2022. Similarly, our immigration advice clinics have not been reintroduced but direct referrals to the solicitor are still in place. Members should also use the UNISON direct immigration helpline run by JCWI.

**English classes:** Phone, email and video tuition continued to be provided by our English teacher over the last 12 months. The online tuition has had positive aspects for some students including its flexibility and ability to be tailored to the needs and pace of individual students. It is also more accessible for members living far from Belfast and is good preparation for an online exam.

However, numbers have become much smaller and while the online system works better for some, it does not attract a similar number of students as the regular classes. We would hope to continue with a hybrid system, keeping some access to remote

learning when physical classes are allowed to start again.

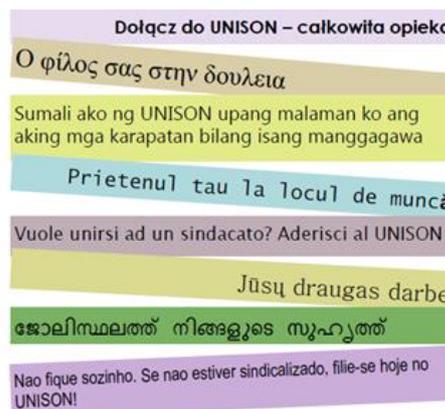


Table 9: Attendance at English classes - Nov 20-Oct 21

Total	F	M
34	18	16

**Support for Refugees and Asylum seekers:** Both our English classes and immigration advice clinics are open to refugees and asylum seekers.

The work of the BMW Group is supported by Local Organiser, Nathalie Donnelly and Area Organiser Marianne Buick..

## Special issue groups

### Retired Members’ Forum

The Retired Members Forum held 4 online meetings during 2021, but online access issues have restricted attendance. It has 45 members and its composition currently stands at 76% women. The Committee has also adopted a new Constitution.

**Recruitment and organising:** Whilst the capacity of the Forum to assist branches has been restricted due to the pandemic, individual members have continued to participate in online recruitment and organising campaigns.

**Campaigns, lobbying and events:** The Forum has continued to campaign and lobby on a series of key UNISON priorities throughout the year with specific action against the removal of the free TV licence for over 75’s. Forum members have participated in all online and physical UNISON rallies and demonstrations including the Stormont

Health Pay event in September. Members have also continued to distribute UNISON information across wider trade union structures and community networks.



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

- UNISON NI Regional Committee – Noel Muldoon;
- National UNISON Retired Members Committee - Martin Gallagher;
- UNISON Retired Members’ Standing Orders Committee - Joyce Griffin;
- UNISON Retired Members’ Conference – Mary Ferris;
- UNISON NDC – Marjorie Trimble;

- National Pensioners’ Convention - Rosaleen Davidson and Mary Ferris;
- ICTU Retired Members’ Committee - Angela Boorman and Archie Thomson.

Archie also is elected to the ICTU Executive Committee to represent retired members across all unions.

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

## ■ Young Members’ Forum

The Forum held a number of online briefings during 2021. Currently only 8 branches send delegates, and we continue to outreach to increase participation. The majority of forum members are new delegates.

**Briefings and campaigns:** Much of our work this year has been focused on encouraging young members to join a host of online activities ranging from our education programme, to UNISON and ICTU seminars, and global solidarity events.

We are mobilising to take part in the COP 26 demonstration in Belfast at 12 noon on 6 November. Regional Committee is also conducting research on Just Transition. Given that the climate emergency has been consistently identified by our young members as a major issue for them, this will be a further opportunity to take part in UNISON direct action.

The forum continued to discuss the key issues facing our young members during

Covid-19 and how to better engage with them. As a result, we have identified a number of other key issues to discuss as part of ‘the month of the young member’ in November. These include:

- mental health issues;
- history of workers’ rights; and
- getting the most from your union.



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 supported through the education programme by Caitlin Ni Chathail (Regional Education Organiser)

## ■ 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 of the additional member-focused health & safety activity undertaken by UNISON NI resulting from Covid-19.

**Health and Safety Group:** The Group met online 3 times during 2021 and has conducted outreach to all branches to increase representation and attendance. This has resulted in increased membership

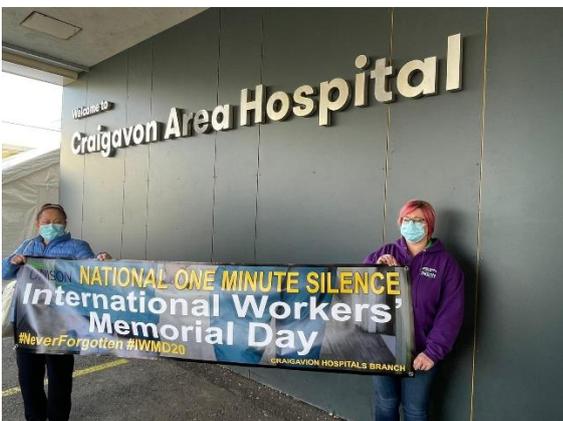
from our education branches over the year, with additional branches confirmed to attend the next Group meeting in December 2021.

The objectives of the Group are:

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

- to actively participate and take the lead within all employers' health and safety committees;
- to ensure the adequate provision of PPE and other H&S equipment and materials for all our members during the pandemic

*Committees and events:* Barry Gorman from UCHT branch, has been elected the UNISON NI rep on the national health and safety committee and is participating in their virtual meetings. Ray Rafferty, Royal and Muckamore branch, and Emma Jane Cullen, Orchard branch, continue to represent UNISON NI on the NIC/ICTU health and safety committee.



*International Workers Memorial Day - 28<sup>th</sup> April:* The traditional NIC-ICTU wreath laying event at the Memorial Tree in Stormont was not possible again this year. All Health Trusts and the Education Authority agreed to UNISON's request to hold a minutes silence to remember all workers who have lost their lives to coronavirus and other work related reasons.

*Be on the safe side / UNISON website and social media:* The Group has supported these initiatives and communication tools and has advised on relevant NI legislation and online materials.

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

**Health & safety recruitment & organising project:** As part of our plan to maximise the health & safety advice, information and support provided to members during Covid-19 we continue:

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

This activity continues to be linked to the UNISON-wide 'Be on the safe side' campaign to identify and train health and safety reps.

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



## Service groups

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

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

There are 53 members of the **Health Service Group**. Its current composition is 74% women. This is an increase from 64% last year. The group has met 3 times in formal session during 2021, with a further 12 briefing sessions and other pay campaign meetings.

There are 24 members of the **Local Government and Education Service Group**. Its composition currently stands at 75% women. The group met 3 times in formal session during 2021 with a further 3 briefing sessions.

## 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 – 2020/21

NI REPRESENTATIVES	
NEC	Gillian Foley (until June 2021); Margaret McKee; Alastair Long; Catherine McKenna (from June 2021)
Local Govt Service Group Executive	Gabrielle Carton, Daphne Hutchinson
Health Service Group Executive	Roberta Magee, Maura McKenna, Jill Weir
Health Sector Committees	Ambulance – Alastair Long; Operational Services – Kim Hall; Nursing – Alan Philson; Science & Technical – Stephen McNeill
Higher Education	Vacant as a result of privatisation
Women’s Committee	Anne McVicker, Deborah Yapicioz (Vice Chair)
Disability Committee	Amanda Sweetlove
LGBT	Gillian Foley; Martin McConnellogue
National Young Members Forum	Emer Kelly and Hannah Lyttle
Health and Safety	Barry Gorman
National Black Members Committee	Patrick Yu and Flora Alfante
National Retired Members	Martin Gallagher



# Developing membership services

## The UNISON College

The UNISON College NI continues to thrive under difficult circumstances. Over the past year the Programme has responded to meet both activist needs in an ever-changing environment, as well as continually adapting the offer to suit members during lockdowns, including more flexible offers during easing of restrictions. Across the two components of the Programme:

- we offered 109 courses and 224 sessions;
- we engaged 1717 activists and members on 66 separate workshop topics;
- 73% of attendees were women.

**Learning in the virtual world:** This was the first year of an entirely virtual programme and the pandemic has brought our virtual capabilities forward by a decade in less than 2 years. As a result, we have been able to more effectively capture those hard to reach members such as those in education and those unable to travel to our regional centres for whatever reason.

Our pool of tutors and providers has expanded, and our virtual courses have given us access to innovative courses and tutors from across the world. With our members and activists being on the pandemic frontline, virtual learning has also given our members the flexibility to learn in their own time.

We have created digital learning hubs for our activist through our PADLETs. These have given new stewards and existing activists access to a range of learning packages from course slides to helpful guides and pre-recorded lectures. For our clinical education we have been able to record a series of lectures which will cover CPD hours and a series for student nurses or those who wish to begin their clinical studies.



This year has not been without its challenges:

- some tutors have insisted on smaller class numbers for interactive sessions;
- there has been high drop off rates for some virtual sessions;
- our content has had to continually adapt to a changing environment and member demand;
- course structure has often had to be redesigned to keep members engaged;
- many courses still are not available as a virtual offer.

**Looking to the future:** Despite these challenges, the past two years have created additional possibilities for member learning. As we re-enter the physical classroom, we will retain some elements of our virtual offer. Earlier this year we surveyed our members and results showed that the majority of respondents were from branches covering rural areas. The majority also wanted to retain an element of online learning; and flexibility to learn in their own time or without the need to travel long distances.

As we reopen and look to the future of our education programme, we expect to retain this online offer for our members. This is an element of the programme that they can flexibly engage with over 400 members accessing pre-records or *eLearning* licences. We would also like to explore options to allow members to virtually attend live courses where this is possible.

ICTU have continued to deliver courses from the South Eastern Regional College (SERC) which has provided accreditation for our 6-day health & safety and our union learning rep training. In order to offer it as an accredited course, a minimum number of participants are required. ICTU also offer a

range of excellent short seminars on topics such as redundancy, pensions and disability provided by the LRA and the Equality Commission NI. We promote these to activists to ensure they have the most up to date information on relevant issues.

## ■ Trade union education

The trade union education courses we deliver are designed:

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

This year, given the pressure our activists have faced during the pandemic, the Programme has had to adapt to accommodate learning needs. Sessions were reworked to allow some pre course work which would then be explored during the live sessions. We also created more learning resources for our activists to allow them to access information and sessions in their own time.

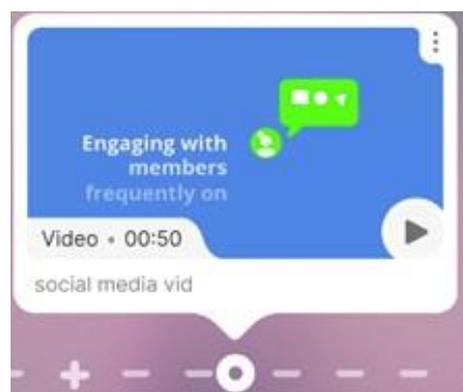
Many of our activists' courses are focused on capacity building and some of them are not suitable for online delivery. We had hoped that we would be able to return to the classroom earlier in the year, however we have only been able to offer one face-to-face course to date as it was outdoors.

Our partial return is now scheduled for late October. This will allow us to offer many of the courses designed over the past 18 months that are better suited to classroom environments, such as emerging leaders; supporting activists; lay tutor training; and our women's development education programme.

### **Negotiating, campaigning and digital skills:**

This year's Programme invested heavily in activist skills to deal with the virtual world. This included intensive support with *digital organising* and building social media pages to

be used as platforms to organise members. 31 activists (45% women) attended the 6 digital organising sessions offered this year. A further 15 activists (93% women) received digital skills training and support prior to the 2021 AGMs. Significant content was also provided to aid activists.



**The organising steward:** Given the intensity of the *organising stewards* course we added additional self-study sessions and increased in-class learning. This course also has a dedicated PADLET page which included all course materials and the ability to rewatch some course content in their own time. This year we ran courses as demand arose and were not restricted by minimum numbers. This year we trained 90 new stewards (62% women).

**Stewards & representation:** In total, 52 members (48% women) attended 5 general stewards and representation courses during 2020/21. The *representing members with health and safety concerns during Covid 19* course was delivered by Thompsons solicitors. Thompsons also recorded *employment law* and *health and safety law* lectures for our stewards.

**Equality and human rights training:** 20 activists (75% women) took part in equality and human rights courses including *Palestine*,

*a local view and Understanding the Assembly.* We can't provide accurate figures on our activist pre-recorded lectures as they are sent out each month in the activist education update (which is circulated to 250 activists).

**Health & safety:** The accredited *health and safety reps* course ran 3 times this year with 33 reps (46% women) attending the *health & safety module 1* course with a further 18 reps (61% women) returning for *health & safety module 2*.

Health and safety continued to be a popular theme for activist training throughout this year and was the biggest area of activist engagement with the programme with 148 activists (76% women) attending the 9 courses and 13 sessions on offer. This included 4 sector specific health and safety webinars, with some focusing on safe re-opening of workplaces and others geared at violence and general health and safety concerns for school based staff.

**Branch officer training:** This year we offered training for most branch officer posts with 25 activists (60% women) attending *branch secretaries, chairs and branch welfare officers* courses. 12 activists (75% women) also attended the *finance and the organised branch* course.

**Women's development education:** This area of the Programme relies heavily on personal interaction which cannot be fully delivered online. We have developed a shorter online version of *pathways (pathways lite)*, and are developing an *emerging leader's* course which will run as soon as we can return to participative face-to-face learning. We are grateful that during the year the Women's Committee stepped in with a series of training and discussion events and also promoted a wide range of webinars related to women's rights and women's health issues. Women's participation in the rest of the programme was 62%. This is encouraging given that the majority of our members were facing unprecedented pressure at work and at home.

**Building new leaders:** 13 activists (62% women) attended a Level 3 ILM accredited *coaching and mentoring course*. With virtual branch AGMs this year, many branches took part in *digital skills training*. This was offered over a series of digital organising workshops and one-to-one session. The package of support ranged from growing the branch social media following; engaging with members; and setting up and hosting virtual meetings effectively. We also offered training to branches to help them use existing tools to engage members, such as WARMS training.

Our **planning for retirement** course returned as a multi topic session with input from Lighthouse and Thompson's solicitors. We offered sessions for those employed by HSCNI and another session for other employers. In total there were 50 participants (60% women).



**Partnering with self-organised groups:** The education programme continues to work closely with our self-organised and special issues groups on a range of courses and training. For example, the Black & Migrant Workers group continued to work with the education team to support the OET and IELTS preparation classes.

We also worked with the Retired Members Forum to develop IT Skills and increase participation in Zoom meetings. This 2-part course assisted with digital skills to engage in meetings, as well as a more in-depth session focusing on hosting virtual meetings.

The welfare committee helped to design the branch welfare officer training and it was delivered by the Chair.

Table 11: UNISON College trade union education by course and main topic, 1 Oct 2020 to 30 Sept 2021

Course	No. of courses	No of Student Places		
		Total	F	M
<b>STEWARDS INDUCTION</b>				
The Organising Steward (Module 1)	4	50	30	20
The Organising Steward (Module 2)	4	40	26	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>56 (62%)</b>	<b>35 (38%)</b>
<i>2019/20</i>	8	98	33 (34%)	65 (66%)
<b>STEWARDS &amp; REPRESENTATION</b>				
Introduction to Employment Law (Pre-recorded content)	Pre-record	N/A	N/A	N/A
Representing members at grievance & disciplinary hearings	1	10	7	3
Health & Safety & the law during Covid	1	19	8	11
Representing members in bullying cases	1	13	8	5
Representing members with social media breaches	1	10	2	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>25 (48%)</b>	<b>27 (52%)</b>
<i>2019/20</i>	8	63	22 (35%)	41 (65%)
<b>NEGOTIATING AND CAMPAIGNING</b>				
Digital Organising	6	31	14	17
Digital Organising for AGMs	15	15	14	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>28 (61%)</b>	<b>18 (39%)</b>
<i>2019/20</i>	4	46	38 (83%)	8 (17%)
<b>EQUALITY &amp; HUMAN RIGHTS TRAINING</b>				
Understanding the assembly	1	4	3	1
Palestine a local view	1	16	12	4
Using equality laws to win (Pre-recorded content)	Pre-record	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>15 (75%)</b>	<b>5 (25%)</b>
<i>2019/20</i>	5	50	14	36
<b>HEALTH &amp; SAFETY REPS</b>				
Health & Safety Module 1	3	33	15	18
Health & Safety Module 2	3	18	11	7
Health and Safety Officer training	1	1	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>27 (52%)</b>	<b>25 (48%)</b>
<i>2019/20</i>	6	85	33 (72%)	52 (28%)
<b>HEALTH &amp; SAFETY &amp; WELLBEING</b>				
Bullying at work	1	17	14	3
Representing members at bullying and harassment hearings	1	13	8	5
Health and Safety for Classroom Assistants	1	19	17	2
Suicide First Aid	3	30	25	5
Managing Challenging Behaviours in the classroom	2	30	25	5
Community Resiliency Model	1	8	7	1
Health & Safety law during Covid	1	19	8	11
Protecting Ourselves and Each Other	1	6	5	1
Health & Safety session - Covid 19 (C&V sector)	2	6	3	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>112 (76%)</b>	<b>36 (24%)</b>
<i>2019/20</i>	8	75	53 (71%)	22 (29%)

Course	No of Student Places			
	No. of courses	Total	F	M
<b>BRANCH OFFICER TRAINING</b>				
Finance & the organised branch	1	12	9	3
Branch Secretaries	1	6	5	1
Branch Welfare Officer	1	4	1	3
Branch Chairs	1	3	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>15 (60%)</b>	<b>10 (40%)</b>
2019/20	4	19	13 (68%)	6 (32%)
<b>BUILDING NEW LEADERS &amp; UPDATING EXISTING LEADERS</b>				
Award in Coaching and mentoring	1	13	8	5
Capturing your Campaign	1	2	2	0
Warms Training	1	10	6	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>16 (64%)</b>	<b>9 (36%)</b>
2019/20	10	102	84 (82%)	18 (18%)
<b>PLANNING FOR RETIREMENT</b>				
Planning for retirement – General	1	12	8	4
Planning for retirement- HSCNI	1	38	22	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>30 (60%)</b>	<b>20 (40%)</b>
2019/20	4	139	118 (85%)	21
<b>TOTAL 2020/21</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>508</b>	<b>316 (62%)</b>	<b>192(38%)</b>

## Member learning programme

Our member learning programme is the biggest area of our virtual offer. Many of the member learning courses are easily adaptable to the webinar style. This allows for flexibility and more opportunity to prerecord sessions.

This part of the programme offered 46 wide-ranging topics this year covering areas such as *professional registration, personal well-being, and promoting best practice in specialist areas*. 1209 learners (81% women) attended a mixture of classroom-based and online courses. Feedback from organisers and workplace reps on the programme as a recruitment tool is consistently positive. Registrations to the member learning programme and course queries are around 50% higher than attendances and show the reach of the programme.



**UPCOMING COURSES**

- 19/11/20 Dignity in the Heart of Health and Social Care 10am
- 23/11/20 Supporting people with Grief and Bereavement 10.15am
- 24/11/20 Supporting Young People Impacted by Bereavement 2pm
- 26/11/20 Managing Challenging Behaviour 10.15am
- 30/11/20 Understanding Pathobiology In Respiratory Health Care 10am
- 4/12/20 Recognising and Managing Sepsis - Case Based Approach 2pm
- 14/12/20 Recognising and Managing the Acutely Unwell Adult 10am

To register email [educationni@unison.co.uk](mailto:educationni@unison.co.uk)

**UNISON COLLEGE**

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

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

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

We secured an increase in 2020/21 funding to £40,000 with the guarantee of around £25,000 from the 5 HSC Trusts to pay for the new *K102 health & social care* module. This will allow us to fund more student places on K102 this year. In addition to this allocation, we secured additional funding from employers allowing us to offer an additional course in the coming year.

**Open University:** The *K101* module has now been replaced by *K102* and is now a pathway to both Nursing and Social Work.

This year we have been able to offer the *K102 module* twice to our members with the biggest ever uptake. We received over 500 applications with 190 (89% women) successful applicants. To enable us to offer so many places on the course we offered application support classes this year which helped more members gain places on the course. This course is normally only open to those in HSCNI employers as some aspects are a partnership approach. However, later this year we will offer an opportunity for all our members to apply to the K102 module.

**Essential skills:** Regional colleges require minimum numbers in order to accredit essential skills courses. We have been able to continue to offer places on courses as part of Union Learning Partnerships with 58 members gaining places this year in English, Maths and ICT.

**Bursaries:** UNISON continues to actively promote a range of bursaries for study towards trade union studies, women's studies, GCSEs, vocational courses and the

Open University. 15 members were awarded a bursary during 2020.

**Skill Academy:** UNISON Learning and Organising Service offered elearning licences to members this year to participate in over 500 different courses in their own time. 42 members from NI used licences.



**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, 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:

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

Table 12: UNISON College member courses and main topic, 1st Oct 2020 to 30<sup>th</sup> Sept 2021

Course	No. of sessions	No. of student places		
		Total	F	M
<b>Protecting professional registration</b>				
NMC Record keeping and accountability	1	7	7	0
<b>Supporting yourself and others</b>				
Bullying at work	2	27	21	6
Caring for the Acutely unwell adult	1	7	6	
Dignity at the heart of social care	2	27	20	7
Community Resiliency Model	1	12	11	1
Understanding Prescription/over the counter drugs misuse	3	26	21	5
Managing Challenging Conversations	1	3	3	0
Young people Impacted by grief	1	3	1	2
<b>Supporting you in your job</b>				
Parkinson's Awareness	1	12	11	1
Foundation Module in Parkinson's	1	4	3	1
Managing Challenging Behaviours in the classroom	1	12	11	1
Dementia – An introduction	1	7	6	1
Dementia – stress and distress	1	8	7	1
Understanding the pathobiology in reparatory health	1	15	9	6
Dignity at the heart of social care	1	12	8	3
Leg Ulcers -Module 1 – Anatomy and Physiology of the Lower Limb	1	20	19	1
Leg Ulcers - Module 2- Leg Ulcer Aetiology	1	26	24	2
Leg Ulcers -Module 3- Introduction to Compression Bandaging	1	10	8	2
Interview skills for health and social care staff	3	37	34	3
Introduction to human biology – 12 separate module topics	12	48	45	3
K102	2	190	170	20
K102 Application support	4	20	19	1
Anaphylaxis recognition and management	1	12	9	3
Understanding How Medicines work	1	8	6	2
Understanding the significance of blood results	1	12	9	3
Infection Recognition and management	1	38	34	4
OET ILETS Preparation classes	4	55	29	26
ECG Recording and basic interpretation	1	62	53	9
Protecting Ourselves and Each Other	1	5	4	1
Supporting people with grief & bereavement	1	3	2	1
Young people impacted by grief	1	3	2	1
Recognising and managing sepsis	1	41	8	33
Skills Academy	eLearning	42	N/A	N/A
Pre-recorded lectures	Pre-records	387	N/A	N/A
<b>Digital Skills</b>				
Zoom 101	2	8	4	4
	58	1209	624 (80%)	156 (20%)

**K102**  
Now open for application  
Download the pack online:  
<https://www.unison-ni.org.uk/education-and-training>  
Closing date 4<sup>th</sup> June 2021  
UNISON COLLEGE

UNISON COLLEGE  
**CALLING ALL CLASSROOM ASSISTANTS**  
HEALTH & SAFETY WEBINAR  
THURSDAY 24TH JUNE 3.30PM  
ZOOM LINK - [HTTPS://BIT.LY/21GQVQK](https://bit.ly/21GQVQK)

**Planning for Retirement**  
Pension and legal advice to those close to retirement.  
**REGISTER NOW!**

## There for you - Welfare services

**UNISON NI Welfare Group:** The Group met online 3 times this year with 26 members (90% women) and 13 branches participating. The Group continues to encourage more branch welfare officers to attend meetings to share information and good practice. There were 7 newly elected branch welfare officers following this year's branch AGMs and they have been invited to join the Group. The online AGM is scheduled for 29 November 2021 and an invitation had been extended to Julie Grant, Head of UNISON 'There for You'. Margaret McKee (NEC) is the Welfare Trustee for UNISON NI.

**Covid-19 Grant:** Following significant awareness raising from the Group and NI branches, there was again a huge number of applications received from members across the union for this £250 grant which has helped those suffering financially due to the impact of the virus. 583 UNISON NI members applied for the grant with £84,419 distributed to NI members. NI branches made generous donations to this fund.

**Winter Fuel Grants:** 265 UNISON NI members applied and £46,080 was distributed.



**School Uniform Grants:** The 2021 grant was launched in July and closed shortly after due to the high number of applications.

**Training:** 7 Group members attended the branch welfare officer training this year and 3 also undertook mentoring training to support those officers newly elected.

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

## UNISON Living - Financial Services

As a result of the pandemic, the distribution of marketing materials and regional visits by UNISON Living partners were suspended. There have been no visits from any of the suppliers, although some continued to liaise with branches and sent promotional information once the suspension was lifted. The result has been a marked reduction in the volume of business across suppliers.

There has also been no UNISON living seminar for the past 2 years. However, the new UNISON living website is now live and gives a full breakdown of what services are available, and by whom, in a more user friendly format.

**UNISON Protect (formerly UIB):** An outreach email sent to all members resulted in 2,254 website hits and 1,581 free insurance registrations.



LV are no longer able to donate their usual shopping vouchers for use in recruitment events but have instead initiated a regional sponsorship which they are keen to be used for regional awards. Emails were sent to all members in April on their behalf and this generated a very significant increase in quotes and policies (see below).



The business done in NI showed a year on year increase of 13% policies in force to the end of July 2021. This is attributed to the regional activity, emails, social media and website.

**Abbey Autoline** were unable to attend the 2021 online AGMs. Despite this, 6663 motor, 963 home, and 72 travel policies were sold to UNISON NI members

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

**Blue Creation** distributed free display stands to all regions and reported high Gazebo sales - two of which were purchased by the region for our outdoor recruitment stalls.

## Legal services

The following is an update report from our solicitors Thompsons to the end of August 2021 on cases and activity. In recent weeks we have had a ground-breaking tribunal success which will be showcased at Regional Council.



### ■ UNISON Personal Injury Cases - Sept 2020 to Aug 2021

Table 13 - UNISON Personal Injury Cases from Sept 2020 to Aug 2021

	2020-2021	2019-2020
Cases received	116	144
Cases closed	158	167
Cases won	92	72
Cases lost	1	5
Cases discontinued/turned down	41	61
Cases where no contact from client	24	29
Turnaround time average	19 months	16 months
Damages	£1,266,276	£800,518
Average Damages	£13,764	£11,118

The following are some notable outcomes:

- **£250,000 for Nursing Auxiliary:** The member received damages for significant physical and psychological injuries sustained following a serious assault by a violent and aggressive patient.
- **£75,000 for Health Worker:** The member suffered from stress following a breach of data protection.
- **£15,000 for Domestic Assistant:** The member tripped on a piece of flooring that had lifted and sustained a back injury during the course of their employment in the Education sector.
- **£20,000 for Nursing Assistant:** The member sustained injury when they tripped on a mat and fell whilst attending a training course.
- **£83,000 for Residential Care Worker:** The member sustained injuries when they were subjected to a vicious assault by a patient during the course of their employment with the Southern Trust.
- **£42,000 for Homecare Worker:** The member suffered a severe leg injury when bitten by a dog whilst attending to a patient in their home.

- **£15,000 for Store Person:** The member sustained a work related upper limb disorder as the result of having to continuously lift heavy equipment during the course of their employment with the Belfast Trust.
- **£29,000 for Care Manager Involved in RTA:** The member suffered injuries when their vehicle was struck by another car at speed.
- **£6,500 for Support Worker:** The member sustained a needlestick injury during the course of their employment within the Community & Voluntary sector.
- **£45,000, £48,000 & £30,000 for Nursing Assistants:** The members suffered from facial injuries and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder following an assault by a patient during the course of their employment with the Southern Trust.

## ■ Employment Rights

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

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

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

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

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

## ■ Extended legal services, training and events

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

**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.

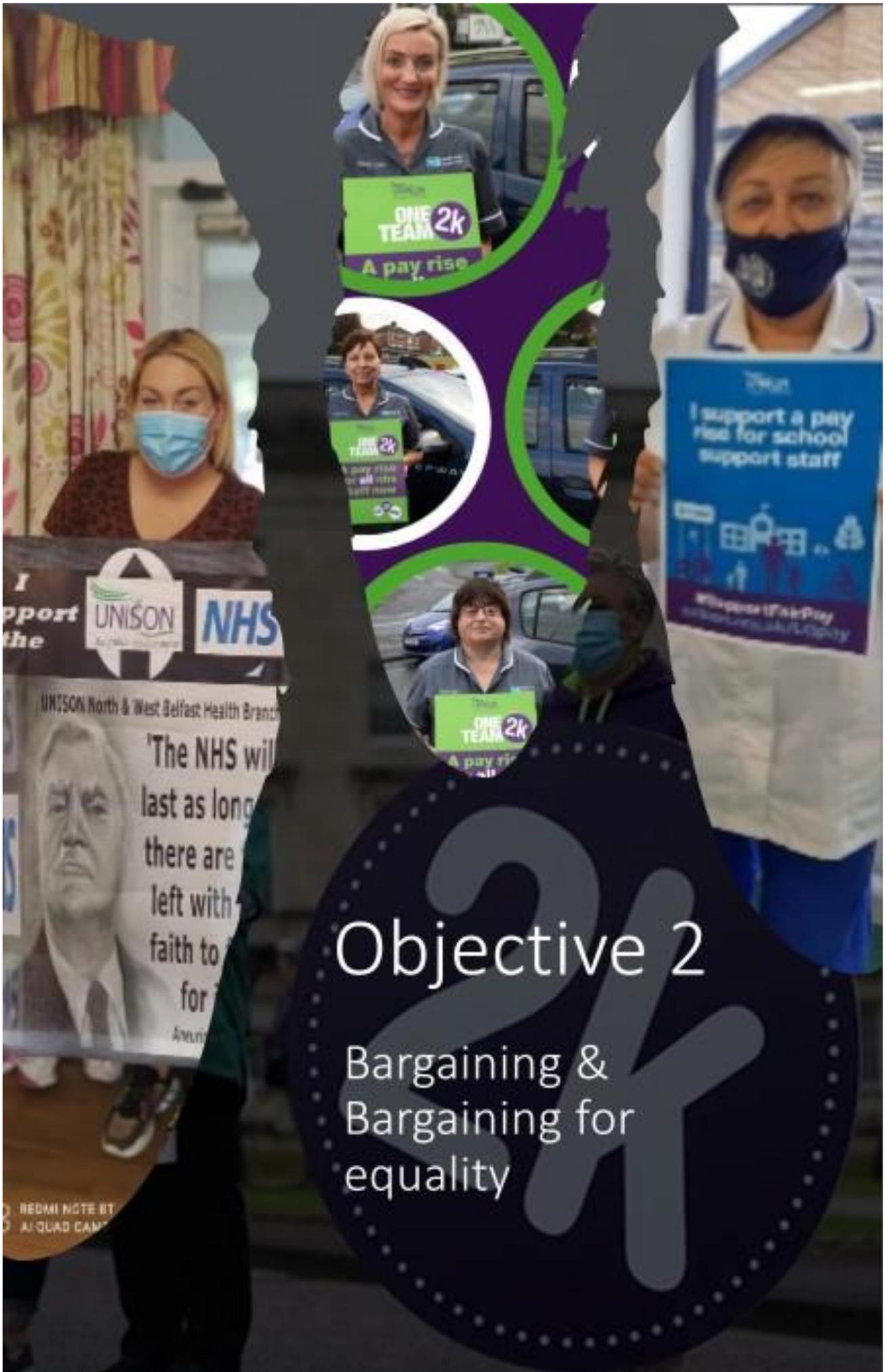
**Conveyancing:** a reduced-price conveyancing service was provided to members.

**Advice Service:** Legal advice was provided to individual members on a range of matters including family law and property matters.

**Training & events:** Due to the pandemic, courses, seminars and events were able to take place by way of Zoom 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

## ■ Ongoing Covid and the new normal

Our response to the pandemic has continued to highlight the value of key workers, mostly women. Many of them are UNISON's core membership. Securing protections and supports, rights and pay justice remains a bargaining priority for us. The whole union's 'no going back to normal' campaign is the foundation of all our campaign priorities and is reflected in our bargaining agenda at all levels.

**Our bargaining teams:** Holding to that bargaining agenda and driving it forward during a Covid pandemic is not an easy task. We have done much of this work online. Our lay activist lead bargainers play a vital role leading trade union teams at Trust level and engaging with employers on a regional basis. There is no doubt that the team working and partnership approach between our lay leadership teams in all sectors and our full-time organisers has contributed substantially to UNISON's ability in NI to defend, protect and represent our members. A great deal of time has been spent at regional level demanding improved covid critical care shift payments in health and examining health and safety issues in all sectors.

Equally, our lay leaders in education have taken hold of key challenges - engaging in all the directorates in the Education Authority. Across finance; operational services; children and young people services; transport; and human resources terms and conditions, UNISON reps have made their mark. This work has been strengthened by team and partnership working with each other and organisers. It has been a big learning curve for us all and our activists have really stepped up to the mark and led from the front.

**Maintaining our equality, consultation and negotiating rights:** One of the main adverse impacts of the public service response to the pandemic has been the tendency of government departments and most employers to side-step their responsibilities to equality screen and impact assess proposed changes

and new policies. We have challenged the downgrading of the work of equality and human rights units in both health and education. This has resulted in UNISON challenging breaches of Section 75 of the NI Act 1998. We have done so in co-ordination with the Equality Coalition.



Key issues that emerged during the pandemic have included concerns around fertility and maternity for workers. Our vigorous interventions contributed to clarifying and strengthening the vaccination guidelines on these issues. We are now undertaking extensive analysis and discussion on the emergence of long Covid issues for workers. We are reviewing 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 Government.

Other key bargaining demands continue to be:

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

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

## ■ New pay campaigns

**Health:** At the conclusion of the Agenda for Change pay agreement, UNISON sought the continuation of collective bargaining on pay. Substantial efforts were made to form a common claim across the four NHS jurisdictions.

UNISON's proposal for a One Team 2k claim was not supported by some other unions who opted instead for double digit percentage increase claims. As we predicted, this put any hope of maintaining collective bargaining out of reach. The Tory government invoked a request to the Pay Review Body to make a pay recommendation. This has inevitably led to the current scenario where a 3% recommended uplift looks likely to be imposed across England, Wales and NI. Scotland had earlier managed to extract a 4% uplift from its devolved government who have some fiscal powers to raise additional revenues.

At the time of writing, we await a formal proposal on pay. Meanwhile, our Health Service Group has pledged to campaign for pay movement above 3%. We have raised challenges to the Health Minister and the full NI Executive to step up and concede our One Team 2k claim.

For health workers in the independent sector, UNISON NI launched a call for a Social Care Forum which would include a focus on pay, terms and conditions for workers delivering care in the homecare and care home sectors. We have successfully secured agreement from the Minister for the creation of such a forum and have had some discussions on its terms of reference. The pandemic and the periods of surge in infection have stalled the advance of this strand.



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 regional health trade union interventions to 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.

Progress on reducing agency spend has not been achieved. 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 in these circumstances. Tackling this issue remains a key priority for UNISON. Our goal is to reinstate safe staffing levels based on a sustainable and stable permanent workforce.

In Belfast Trust, UNISON ensured that over 200 support service vacant posts were filled on a permanent basis. In the months ahead we will be seeking to convert admin posts covered by agency and temporary contracted staff into permanent jobs.

In homecare there is a continuing and growing reliance on the private sector. Our bargaining,

public policy and campaign strategies are interlinked and require us to challenge all of this at Government, public body and individual employer levels.



All of this has taken place in the context of the pandemic which has severely challenged the capacity of the health service to meet the needs of the people. Since we last met at Regional Council, services have had to be reconfigured and, in many instances, severely curtailed or suspended. The challenges this has presented for staff has been immense. Coping with health and safety needs, medical and social care has seen the agendas of all our bargaining structures – at regional, Trust and workforce level – dominated by issues of availability of PPE and testing.

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

**Education:** The paltry offer of 2.75% on pay point 1, and 1.75% for all above points, from employers in NJC negotiations will be rejected across England, Wales and NI (Scotland has

separate local government arrangements). We have consulted with all our education members who are covered by NJC agreements. The next step is preparation for an industrial action ballot. We will be engaged in a round of meetings with our members to outline the key issues involved and the likelihood of industrial action in early 2022 if approved in the forthcoming ballot.

We are also pushing ahead on the EA commitment to undertake a pay and grading review. The goal on trade union side is to reduce the number of NJC spinal points which EA uses in its pay structure. While there is a willingness on the part of the EA management to respond to trade union side, they cite lack of funding from the Department of Education as a key impediment to making pay improvements. We have suggested a joint approach to the Department for funding and are currently making this happen.

A very specific pay issue is the collapse of differentials between supervisory and core staff in cleaning and catering. UNISON has formally asked for an interim arrangement to address this issue. We are responding to a growing exit of key supervisory staff from this workforce and have raised serious concerns of weakening sustainability of the workforce in these support services.

We recently consulted with our members about stepping up this campaign and received an overwhelming mandate to take these issues forward. Future action on a union-wide basis may be hampered by GB anti-trade union laws requiring a 50% postal ballot turnout. As previously reported, we prevented this change from being made in NI.

## ■ Pursuing the UNISON agenda

A key priority in 2021 continues to be one of responding to significant developments in the health, education, community, voluntary and private sectors on challenges to our members' rights and trade union rights including recognition and the establishment of collective bargaining.

**Health and social services sector:** It is over 30 years since our members took sustained industrial action and won the right to be consulted on decisions before they are taken. We have had to be extremely vigilant at regional, Trust and branch level. We cannot allow either government departments or public sector employers to pick and choose what they will consult UNISON on. Strategic

and policy discussions continue to take place which have transformational impact on health services and our members' jobs, ignoring the fact that transformation only succeeds with the co-operation of unions and staff. Monitoring developments and ensuring accountability and transparency has significantly increased the workload of UNISON staff and activists.

Additionally, lay and staff bargainers have worked closely together to highlight serious problems across the social care sector in homecare and nursing homes. We intervened early in the surge period with the PHA and the RQIA on the absence of their interventions. UNISON was instrumental in securing guaranteed pay during the first surge for domiciliary care and an improvement in sick pay from statutory to occupational earnings.

We are now grappling with the restart strategy across the health service, winter pressures and an emerging second surge of the Covid pandemic. All our bargaining structures are now geared up for interventions at regional, local and workplace level to meet this head on. Attempts to centralise governance and management of the health service in the hands of the senior civil service team have been challenged. UNISON is leading interventions at a bargaining and policy level to reinstate and maintain direct engagement of health staff in the implementation of Restart.

**Engagement with nursing sector structures:** UNISON has regional representation on the Central Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Committee and the NI Professional Education Council. Although staffing pressures have prevented our reps from attending a full nursing forum, a focus on nursing issues has been incorporated into briefing sessions held by the Head of Bargaining for health sector membership.

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

carried out for health branches in early 2021 by UNISON pensions officers Colm Porter and Alan Fox, on each of the schemes and the remedies proposed in the consultation. The briefing gave a background to the judgement, the former and current pensions schemes, and the remedies proposed, in order to assist with responses to the consultation. A further briefing will be available before year end.

**Education sector:** The closure of schools during the first pandemic surge presented bargaining challenges around the protection of employment rights. The re-opening of schools in 2021 highlighted continuing concerns of education workers. Towards the end of the summer we worked with teaching unions in a challenge to the Department's rushed plans. Major difficulties arose in early September 2021 around guidance on isolation, contact tracing and testing. These remain contested issues and we have brought these to the attention of the NI Assembly Education Committee.



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

There are two new areas of concern in the education workforce – cleaning and catering. In cleaning, the EA provides for only 50% of schools. We are pushing for a new EA strategy to encourage schools to avail of the EA cleaning service. Large numbers of vacancies in the catering service is also a worrying development.

Management are pointing to low levels of interest and small numbers of applications. Trade union side have raised a number of issues which might explain this, including Covid anxiety, pay levels, and poor advertising of posts. Management side have committed to addressing these issues.

Our bargaining team in school's catering has worked hard to ensure the maintenance of school meals provision during the pandemic and has contributed to plans to raise the nutritional standards of school meals. Health and safety standards in school transport have also been a focus on the bargaining agenda.

**Common challenges across all sectors:** We continued to ensure local and regional negotiating bodies reflect UNISON's bargaining priorities, including:

- bargaining for recognition agreements, especially in social care, the private sector and the community and voluntary sectors;
- a challenge to the reduction in the pay of special needs staff by changing contracts;
- working with the EA to implement a new policy on menopause (a result of bringing campaigning issues to the bargaining table);

- equality bargaining with all employers – with a priority on support for front line workers grappling with childcare issues. This is now a major issue across all bargaining structures, and we are closely co-ordinating these interventions with employers, with our campaigning work with providers and the political system;
- challenging privatisation across public services;
- successfully pursuing up-banding for Trust staff;
- successfully securing permanent contracts for temporary staff in some Trusts;
- pursuing the demand for a real living wage across all sectors;
- challenging cuts to government funding to the community and voluntary sector by applying S75 to cuts;
- assessing the impact of EU Exit on the workforce and services;
- pursuing ethical procurement, including the supply chain, in health and education;
- continued participation by our appointed lay activists in the new pension schemes governance bodies (both NILGOSC and HSC).

## ■ Challenging privatisation in health and education

**Keeping services in-house:** Following a 14 year-long campaign we secured all health service support workers back in-house. The new privatisation threat is the replacement of in-house staff across many occupations by agency workers. We are now pursuing implementation of commitments to fill vacancies across all sectors of the workforce where an unacceptable reliance on agency staff is costing millions off the health budget. In Royal Hospitals we have commenced the transfer of temporary workers to permanent posts starting with support services and moving to nursing and other grades. The model being developed is transferable.

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



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

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

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

On the in-house side, we have forced all Trusts to maintain the direct workforce at current levels with a view to restoring in-house delivery. Where permanent posts in direct provision are available, UNISON supports the movement of staff from the independent sector into these jobs.

**Private medicine:** The pandemic is being used as cover for the wholesale transfer of medical services from the NHS to the private sector. The waiting lists and waiting times, which absolutely must be brought down, are being used as the rationale for the transfer. This is the biggest privatisation threat the health service has faced to date. Regional Committee, service groups and branches will shortly embark on a major campaign to challenge this development.

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



### Examples of bargaining interventions with wider implications

**Sleep-ins:** Following advice received from Senior Counsel, UNISON are considering the legal implications of the UK Supreme Court judgement in the Mencap judgement. This states that sleep-in care workers are not entitled to the national minimum wage for time that is not spent performing specific activities.

**West Belfast youth workers:** This was an example of the Education Authority's failure to properly handle redeployment and redundancy. It arose from restructuring of youth services in West Belfast that affected 5 members and which was badly handled by line management. Regional intervention secured voluntary redundancy for 2 staff and redeployment for 2 staff. There are remaining contested issues concerning the fifth member.

**Mental Capacity Act:** The delayed implementation of the Mental Capacity Act (2016) raised concerns for affected members in all the Trusts. Joint union intervention led by UNISON secured mitigating protocols and has brought the issue of staffing pressures and resources onto the regional bargaining table. UNISON will press for a review at year end of the first few months implementation.

**Shared services:** Department of Health plans on regional shared IT services, the Encompass programme (digitalisation of patient records) and HR PTS system revision are currently being monitored by health joint secretaries. As these plans emerge across the Trusts, our UNISON teams will become more involved in the coming months. A regional briefing will be held on all these issues for staff and lay leads.

### ■ Pay uplifts and other successes

As part of our **Agenda for Change 'Pay Max'/Refresh** strategy, all AFC Band 1 staff across NHS Health Trusts were given the option to move up to the Band 2 on the AFC pay scale. In Belfast Health Trust this involved around 1200 staff moving to Band 2 with 3 years backdated pay secured by UNISON.

In addition, with UNISON support, around 100 estate services and 30 ward clerks in the Belfast Trust achieved an uplift in their AFC banding with backdated pay. Our work continues with the Belfast Trust on seeking re-evaluation of AFC banding for the roles of nursing assistant, security and specialised nursing roles such as intensive care.

In the South Eastern Trust, job evaluations have been submitted for estates assistants and multi skilled estates roles, security jobs, homecare, district nursing staff, and other specialised nursing roles.

In the Southern Health Trust a number of posts have been uplifted through the AFC 'changed job process' such as support workers, assistant cooks, admin staff in all areas including OT, children's services and learning disability. Work on the uplift of band 1 workers to band 2 and others is continuing. In negotiations with the Trust, UNISON branch negotiators ensured the transfer of over 150 homecare care agency workers to permanent Trust contracts.

In the Northern Trust, in addition to Band 1 staff moving up to Band 2, over 700 staff - including those working in homecare, admin and estates, have had their posts upgraded to a higher pay band. A number of health care assistants working in the community were also upgraded to band 4 with back pay.

In the Western Trust, work is ongoing with job evaluations for a range of staff including homecare and reablement staff. For the 2nd year, we secured retrospective accrued annual leave payments for homecare workers. UNISON is now seeking retrospective payments for the failure of the Trust to calculate sick pay entitlement in accordance with Agenda for Change terms and conditions.



**Social care registration:** To mitigate the financial hardship for our members working in homecare during the height of the pandemic,

we secured agreement from the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) to defer registration renewal fees for registrants. We halted the removal of registrants from the NISCC register in August, delaying any removals of registrants who have failed to renew their registration to practice until 11<sup>th</sup> October. We have developed proposals to address the difficulties with the registration process to be put forward to management.

**Homecare and care home recognition:** We secured recognition with a private homecare provider – Strabane & District Caring Services; and secured the transfer of trade union recognition for our members with Healthcare Ireland Ltd and Anne's Care Homes Ltd, following the takeover of several homes from Four Seasons Healthcare. We have secured TUPE rights for the affected staff.

We are currently dealing with a major scandal in Court Care Home, another Four Seasons transfer. The home is at the centre of an 'Invest in a Room' scandal, and has had its licence withdrawn by RQIA. The residents have been moved, and the employer has withheld pay from our members. UNISON, GMB and RCN are involved and the ensuing campaign is supported by ICTU.

We continue pay negotiations with a number of private sector care homes, the most recent being a successful 6% uplift in Kilmorey Homes.

Negotiations continue with the **Health & Social Care Board** on the migration and transfer of staff to the Business Services Organisation with the Board's closure in April 2022.

Negotiations are ongoing with the **NI Library Authority** to agree a process for job evaluation for branch managers and assimilation onto NJC pay scales, and the terms of reference have now been agreed. In the coming months UNISON will also be dealing with the Authority on their organisational restructuring plans which involves the creation of new district manager and service manager posts.

The NJC pay award has been accepted by the Authority and the work on reducing spinal

points and assimilation for staff on these new points is now complete.

In December 2019 Phase 1 of pay negotiations concluded with the **Further & Higher Education Colleges**. We were successful in achieving regional pay for non-teaching staff based on NJC pay awards. This year saw the NJC grading review completed, addressing grade boundaries and the number of pay scales within each band. The review saw the removal of band 1 from the pay scales.

TUPE transfers have been taking place with a number of contractors and a pay claim will be served on behalf of our outsourced members with those contractors.

**Higher Education:** UNISON and UCU successfully halted the major changes the Ulster University Competence Test Centre tried to make to the contracts of a group of nurses who work for the NMC. Staff also received the annual leave entitlement backdated to when they started working for the UU.



**Local Government:** UNISON have concluded negotiations with Mid & East Antrim Council on the standardisation and harmonisation of the terms and conditions of employment of staff from the 3 legacy councils that now comprise Mid & East Antrim. Following negotiations, agreement was reached in July on standardised terms and conditions for council staff. UNISON have ensured that staff remained protected on the NJC Greenbook terms and conditions of employment.

**Private contractors:** Negotiations continue with Arjo UK focusing on career progression, training, recruitment and retention of staff. We TUPE transferred Ulster University catering

staff from Mount Charles to Compass. Negotiations continue on pay and conditions for University of Ulster staff employed by Noonans. Our aim is to secure uplift beyond the minimum wage.

**Community and Voluntary Sectors:** We were able to secure full pay protection for staff self-isolating or shielding due to Covid-19 with organisations such as Apex Housing, Newington Housing Association, Women's Resource and Development Agency and First Housing Support Services.

In negotiations with Apex Housing we achieved increases to sick leave entitlement for staff, the introduction of a menopause policy and a commitment to undertake job evaluation for all support staff and direct labour staff in the year ahead.

Working with the Simon Community NI, a review of frontline and admin workers' pay resulted in staff receiving an upgrade to their posts and an average 4% increase in their pay. In addition to this, staff also received a 2% pay award backdated to April.

De Paul Ireland members received a 3% pay increase in April with a further uplift between 3.5% and 10% in July for all project staff, ancillary staff and office grade staff.

In response to the UNISON demand for a recognition payment similar to that announced for health workers, in July the DfC announced that workers employed under the NIHE Supporting People Programme are to receive a £500 covid recognition payment.





## Objective 3

Campaigning, public policy & 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. In the current climate, where a massive attack is being launched on public services, 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 overall economic situation and the impact of welfare reform;
- their rights as workers and their jobs and conditions in specific sectors;
- the health and education of their children;
- reforming our health and social care system to create a public health model for them and their families which aims to eradicate health inequalities;
- care for older people and their families;
- mental health care for them and their families – with a particular focus on suicide;
- job opportunities and career development for them and their families;
- better use of public money to create local jobs;
- better delivery of public services to tackle poverty, 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;
- protecting our members, their families and communities from the negative effects of exit from the European Union;
- targeting social need so that no one gets left behind.

## Current political context

Government returned in January 2020 with the 'New Decade, New Approach' agreement which sets out a range of actions in a range of areas where UNISON has been actively campaigning. However, the Programme for Government has now been vetoed at Executive level several times and is stalled. There is no movement on critical elements of NDNA

While there has been something of a collective government response to the pandemic, we are not witnessing genuine power sharing within an equality and human rights framework. There is every possibility that, had it not been for the Covid-19 virus, government would have collapsed again. UNISON has shown that it is willing to do business with all Ministers and all government departments. This not always reciprocated.



We continue to demand that government enters into real social dialogue with civil society in general, and the trade union movement in particular, on all the major issues affecting our members, their families and their communities. We will accept nothing less and will hold our Executive to account against these standards, particularly in the forthcoming NI Assembly elections in 2022.

Throughout the year we have continued to meet Executive Ministers and departments on core issues identified by our membership. We have stressed the need for the entire Executive to work together in meeting these challenges.

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to have major social and economic impacts on all the people. However, it is increasingly clear that Covid-19 has disproportionately impacted the poorest and most deprived areas in our society.

This has occurred in the context of over a decade of austerity, where instead of prioritising investments in health, education and social protection, budgets have been cut and poverty has increased.



Regional Council 2022 will take important decisions on our political strategy as this government mandate ends and another starts in early 2022.

Our priorities with Government and employers continue to include:

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

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

**Programme for Government:** We made a comprehensive submission during the consultation on the Outcomes Framework. However, it is this Framework which has been vetoed by one of the Executive parties and this has led to the main Programme for Government being stalled. This has profound consequences for all of our members, for public services and for society in general.

## ■ The impact of exiting the EU

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

- liaised closely with the General Secretary and the HQ team and ensured that the protection of the Good Friday Agreement and prevention of a hard border is a priority across the whole union;
- produced extensive impact analyses;
- engaged with the UK and Irish Governments, the EU institutions, UK political parties, all local political parties, US political representatives and sought

clear commitments from the British Labour Party;

- sponsored and participated in special conferences and seminars;
- worked closely with our allies in ICTU and the equality and human rights sector.

At 11pm on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020, the transition period under the Withdrawal Agreement ended and the UK left the EU single market and customs union. However, NI remains aligned to the EU single market and customs union to maintain an open border on the island of Ireland under the Withdrawal Agreement Protocol.

The arrangements within the Protocol relating to trade are subject to ongoing ‘democratic consent’ by the NI Assembly. The Assembly will vote for the first time on whether it wishes for the arrangements set out in the Protocol to be maintained 4 years after the end of the transition period (end of 2024 at the earliest). This makes it very likely that the upcoming Assembly election campaign will be dominated by debate around the Protocol, with unionist political parties voicing strong opposition against it.

The original ‘backstop’ agreed by Theresa May’s Government included some limited protections for workers’ rights, providing that the UK could not diverge below a common floor of standards that exist at the end of the transition period. This was stripped from the agreement reached by Boris Johnson and we continue to monitor closely any attempt to weaken or remove key rights at work. A key ongoing priority will be to campaign to ensure that our devolved Assembly and Executive both retains the power to continue to legislate in line with improving standards at the EU level and does so.

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

EU law underpins a range of key workers’ rights and obligations on employers. These cover areas including employment, equality, and health and safety laws. Outside of the EU, future Governments could try to remove key rights and obligations currently required by EU membership. The UK will no longer be required to keep pace with rights at EU level. Within the NI Protocol, the UK committed to the non-diminution of some rights contained within the GFA as a result of Brexit and the establishment of a ‘Dedicated Mechanism’ comprised of the NI Human Rights Commission and NI Equality Commission.

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 relating to the rights of British and Irish citizens, immigration issues and continuing rights to access healthcare.



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. Too many have reduced the impact of the UK exit from the EU on NI to questions of how goods will move across the border, North and South, when in reality the UK exiting the EU presents much more serious issues negatively affecting the peace process; massively interfering in the day-to-day lives of our members, their families and their communities; and interfering in the delivery of public services.

Exiting the EU threatens the key aspects of the Peace Agreement relating to equality of citizenship and parity of esteem, creating borders and tensions between communities that the Good Friday Agreement was meant to bring down. We will continue to work with colleagues across UNISON and wider civil society to protect the rights of British and Irish citizens under the Common Travel Area.

**Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA):** The TCA came into operation at the end of January and 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, a significant area of concern during the process of negotiating the TCA was the UK Government’s unwillingness to commit to ‘level playing field’ provisions guaranteeing labour, social and environmental rights in NI. The final agreement contains only weak commitments in this regard, limited to not lower current levels of labour and social protections to the extent that any reductions may affect trade or investment.

Across UNISON, concerns exist that rights in these areas will therefore be eroded over time, since proving that reductions in rights for workers, for example, has negatively impacted on trade or investment will be extremely challenging.

UNISON has recently contributed to a new report, 'Human Rights and Equality in NI Under the Protocol: A Practical Guide', published by Queen University, Donia Human Rights Centre and the Social Change Initiative. Given that these rights are already being undermined by the UK Government, the Guide becomes an essential tool for seeking remedies and taking further action.



**Internal Market Bill:** 12 months ago, we reported that the attack on the Good Friday Agreement and Human Rights Act has already begun through the Internal Market Bill recently presented at Westminster. This Bill seeks to unilaterally override the Protocol, an Act that the UK Government openly admits will breach international law. However, even setting aside these parts, the Bill significantly and negatively impacts devolution across the UK, particularly for NI.

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

In addition, the Bill expressly seeks to limit the application of the Human Rights Act 1998 in this scenario. To undermine the Human Rights Act in this way is particularly troubling, as the UK Government is required under the GFA to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights in domestic law, including direct access to the courts and remedies for

breach of the Convention. We worked in conjunction with a wide range of civil society groups in NI to oppose these provisions within the Bill, engaging with the Dedicated Mechanism, UK Government, US political leaders and Irish Government. As a result, the UK Government removed several clauses within the Bill that allowed it power to breach international law and disapply the Human Rights Act. It was also required to offer reassurances that the Bill would not be used to impede equality or employment laws.

**Protecting the Common Travel Area:** Free movement of people as a right under EU law is of critical importance to UNISON members, their families and communities, particularly those living in border areas who cross the border on a regular basis to work in NI.

With the right to freedom of movement set to end, the Common Travel Area (CTA) has frequently been presented as a solution to maintaining freedom of movement for Irish and British citizens across these islands and to sustain rights associated with this, including the right to work and access public services. However, concerns have been expressed by both the NI Human Rights Commission and the Irish Human Rights Commission that the CTA is effectively written in sand, open to change and amendment, particularly with the UK outside of the EU. Whilst the UK and Irish Governments have signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the CTA, this is not legally binding and stronger action is required.

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

Last year we reported that alongside our allies in CAJ, we successfully engaged with politicians from a range of parties at Westminster to have amendments debated on the Immigration and Social Security Coordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill relating to the rights protected under the Common Travel Area. This Bill was passed ending the EU right to freedom of movement within the

UK, but provides Irish citizens with a standalone right to enter and reside in the UK. Our amendment seeking that the Government clearly identify the differences between the rights of the Common Travel Area and the rights under the Settled Status scheme, so Irish citizens could make an informed decision on whether to apply for this scheme or not, was not passed.

**Protecting migrant workers:** The EU Settlement Scheme closed on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021. We have thousands of migrant worker members in NI who make a vital contribution to the delivery of public services. To protect them and their families we are working with CAJ and the Migrant Centre.

Now the Settlement Scheme has closed, we are concerned that any workers who have not secured their settled status could experience difficulties in maintaining their employment, residency and ability to access services. We are also concerned at the potential for the precarious and exploitative working practices that have affected non-EU, EEA migrants previously to now affect an increasing number of members. We are concerned that with the ending of freedom of movement and the closing of the EU Settlement Scheme there will be an increasing need for immigration advice and representation for our members. We gave evidence to the NI Affairs Committee at Westminster on these issues in September.

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

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

We believe that the proposed future immigration framework for the UK is flawed and will only exacerbate the difficulties that already exist in recruiting workers for our public services. The proposed salary threshold is completely unrealistic in NI, in particular given the already low rates of pay experienced by workers across the public sector and by those working in private companies providing public services.



**Securing support within the United States for protecting the peace process:** We believe that the hard-line approach by the UK Government to exiting the EU was motivated by ambition to secure a de-regulated free trade deal for the UK with the US. UNISON has been very clear that we will not accept any attempt to put our NHS up for sale nor will we allow a free trade deal that leads to major de-regulation of workers' rights or product standards. Of equal concern is the idea that the US and UK would strike a trade deal which compromises the Good Friday Agreement.

In response to this threat, we have continued to engage with US political leaders via our unique consortium of civic and business representatives from NI. We have regularly engaged in Zoom meetings with the Ad Hoc Committee on Protecting the Good Friday Agreement and provided briefings for the new Biden administration.

The UK Government continues to underestimate the strength of support in the US for our Peace Agreement from both parties. US Congressional leaders, including Speaker Nancy Pelosi, have been clear that they will not allow a free trade deal with the UK that compromises the Good Friday Agreement. Since assuming office, President Biden has made repeated statements of support for the Good Friday Agreement, including in direct engagement with Boris Johnson.

## ■ Economic strategy

**NI draft budget 2021/22:** We are deeply concerned that across public services, budgets remain in severe difficulty and ultimately it is our members and the public that will bear the harshest impact of any return to austerity measures as a result of Covid-19. Excluding Covid supports, the core of day-to-day expenditure in NI is expected to remain flat. The Executive now finds itself in much the same financial situation it was in when the devolved institutions collapsed in 2017.

Despite the clear evidence that the impact of Covid-19 had been exacerbated by over a decade of austerity and a failure to combat poverty and inequality, the November 2020 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) at Westminster again represented an austerity plan for public services.

The CSR did not restore levels of public spending in NI to pre-austerity levels, nor has it provided the investment needed to reform and improve services delivered within health and social care, education or the community and voluntary sector for the benefit of the public and workers alike. In reality, NI is living with the same budgetary settlement that it started out with in the teeth of the global financial crisis over a decade ago.

The budget is single year. The Westminster CSR has resulted in block grant funding for the day to day running of public services in NI remaining flat. Single year budgets such as these do not allow for clear, multi-year plans for sustained investment in public services or a proper funding stream for public sector pay.

Following repeated pressure from the trade union movement and the public, the Executive has now made a call for a new deal for additional funding and has recently taken a collective stand against the removal of the Universal Credit uplift. It remains to be seen what the UK Government response will be.

UNISON is seeking a funding settlement that:

- allows Government to invest in our public services so they can be rebuilt and reformed;
- ensures public sector workers and all those in private sector providers delivering public

services are recognised through decent pay and terms and conditions;

- addresses our sustained levels of poverty and deprivation through proper social security protections and investment on the basis of objective need;
- builds a fairer and more equal economy and society within a framework of equality and human rights.



**Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme:** The job retention scheme introduced in 2020 to cover 80% of wages for furloughed staff has now ended. The additional supports which have replaced it are entirely inadequate to save jobs and keep workers out of poverty. We have very few furloughed members but it is clear that there will be significant redundancies across the economy over the coming months. This will deepen hardship and increase the strain on public services

**No Going Back to Normal:** Now that the applause for essential workers has died down, it is clear from the UK government response on public sector pay, and the withdrawal of the £20 uplift in benefit payment, that it has every intention of going back to normal. From our perspective, the union is now facing a tough campaign which will require solidarity to prevent further sacrifice by our members. A UNISON motion on the collective strategies we need will be debated in late October at the ICTU Biennial conference. The UNISON response will be a concerted campaign co-ordinated by Regional Committee, the service groups and branches. Maintaining the strong links we have forged with our allies in civil society will be vital in our strategic action plan.

In our motion, we are calling for our movement to develop a new political engagement strategy towards both the Irish Government, NI Executive and UK Government to take forward the recommendations within

‘No Going Back’. This include seeking to ensure:

- that the UK Government honours its commitments and makes the necessary resources available for public services in NI, including through reforms in Government revenue raising measures;
- that the Irish and UK Governments implement their obligations under international human rights treaties and ILO conventions in relation to socio-economic rights and the rights of workers;
- that Governments North and South develop meaningful bi-lateral relationships with ICTU to produce the cross-cutting policies, strategies and outcomes required to improve the social and economic position of all the people;
- that the rights of workers, their families and their communities are not eroded as a result of Brexit, but instead strengthened moving forwards. This should include Congress re-engaging in its previous campaigns for a Bill of Rights and an all-island Charter of Rights.

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

## 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 with the following placed at the centre of this process:

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

In July the Finance Minister announced a new policy for public procurement contracts that puts an emphasis on social value. From June 2022, Government contracts will include the living wage as a condition of contract tenders. While this is a positive development, it applies to Government contracts but does not yet apply to public sector procurement. We are, however, using it as leverage in our negotiations with the health service on the procurement of medicine, social care, and mental health services in particular.

## Employment and trade union law

On matters of employment and trade union legislation, the trade union movement speaks with one voice through the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. As reported last year, the NI Executive had agreed, in ‘New Decade, New

Approach’, to bring forward a new Programme for Government to include measures to protect workers’ rights by April 2020. These include a commitment to becoming a Living Wage employer; moving to ban zero hours

contracts; and that powers to set minimum wage levels should be made a devolved matter.

Employment and equality laws are devolved to NI. The Programme for Government provides an opportunity for the Executive to clearly commit not only to maintain existing rights and standards, but to further develop such rights progressively over time, in line with developments at the EU level.



While there has been some movement on living wage through the new arrangements for government contracts, there is no movement on other commitments. The trade union demand is that the real Living Wage be the minimum rate of pay across all public sector employment, and across all procurement, grant aid or sub-contracting activity that is undertaken. This should be supplemented by an effective strategy to monitor and where necessary enforce such pay rates.

At an early stage, the Minister for the Economy indicated that she had no plans to implement the NDNA commitments that fall within her brief. We are pursuing this through ICTU where our agenda includes the demand for the right

to collective bargaining for all workers. In order to protect workers' rights, the Executive must further recognise the impact of Brexit in this area. EU law has long underpinned a range of key employment and anti-discrimination laws. Outside of the EU, the UK Government can seek to weaken or erode these rights over time, and that there will be divergence between standards as EU law further develops.

During the process of negotiating the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), it became increasingly clear that the UK Government was unwilling to commit to 'level playing field' provisions guaranteeing workers' rights in NI. The final TCA contains only weak commitments in these areas, primarily not to lower current levels of labour and social protections to the extent that any reductions may affect trade or investment. There is no commitment to 'dynamic alignment' between the EU-UK over time. The potential that rights in these areas will therefore be eroded has increased.

As reported last year, we are co-ordinating an ICTU response to a Private Members' Bill on trade union freedoms, with a particular focus on seeking a statutory right to collective bargaining. This involves working with all parties to secure support.

ICTU has produced a guidance for MLAs setting out the trade union position on future workers and trade union rights and is currently updating it.

## ■ The climate emergency, environment and just transition

2021 Regional Council will debate motions on these topics. We are currently making preparations to take part in the COP26 demonstrations due to take place on 6 November.

There has finally been movement on climate change in NI in the form of two separate NI Assembly Bills. The first is a Private Member's Bill (PMB), brought by the Green Party. The second has been proposed by the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). The PMB is the more ambitious and seeks to establish a mandate for climate change mitigation and

adaptation in NI. Crucially, it sets a net-zero carbon emissions target for 2045. The DAERA bill, by contrast, looks towards 2050 and asks that NI makes an "equitable contribution" to the UK's overall net-zero target. In effect, this means a cut of at least 82% of emissions by 2050. The DAERA bill also includes provisions for emissions targets to be adjusted in the future.

Through ICTU the trade union demand is for the principles of 'just transition' to be included in both Bills. The just transition framework describes a series of adaptation principles designed to protect workers

against the worst effects of climate breakdown. A zero-carbon world is possible and necessary, but we have choices about how this transition is managed. A just transition entails environmental sustainability alongside decent work, social inclusion and poverty eradication.

The transition to a zero-carbon economy is especially urgent, and many people incorrectly believe that this transition mostly concerns the energy sector. However ignoring the care sector - including health and social care, childcare and education - would mean excluding a significant and growing part of the world of labour. Green energy transitions in public services drive important changes in energy and manufacturing. If the concept of just transition has poverty eradication and social justice at its core, it is essential to include health and education, which are integral to the welfare state.

The consequences of climate change will continue to impact on health and safety for the public services workforce. Primary effects include heat exhaustion and fatigue, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, coronary artery disease and kidney disease. Secondary effects include increases in allergic disorders and a broadening of the range of disease vectors. These health risks will impact on working conditions, and are exacerbated by high humidity, low air convection, wearing personal protective equipment and inadequate break conditions. Many of our health and social care staff have experienced these unsustainable and oppressive conditions during the pandemic.



As the effects of extreme weather events and pollution also impact the wider public, climate breakdown will put severe amounts of workload pressure on an already overstretched and understaffed public services workforce.



**UN CLIMATE  
CHANGE  
CONFERENCE  
UK 2021**

Despite this, the DAERA Bill does not make explicit or implicit reference to any just transition principles. The PMB engages more substantively with the concept of just transition. It requires that sectoral plans are published, containing support for jobs and growth of climate-resilient work, the creation of high-value, fair and sustainable jobs and the reduction of inequality, poverty and social deprivation.

However, these sectoral plans are limited to specified sectors. Healthcare and emergency services are not included. Given that the climate emergency will have – and, indeed, is already having – disastrous impacts on human health, it is essential that health and social care and emergency services should be subject to sectoral plans. Both climate bills must recognise and mitigate against this strain on public services, which will necessarily include adequate and sustainable funding.

The nation's current focus on pandemic recovery presents us with a rare opportunity to think about how climate breakdown impacts upon all sectors of society and public life – including our public services. The interdependency of environmental justice and the safe delivery of public services must feature in post-pandemic recovery strategies.

Regional Committee continues to encourage all negotiators to use the UNISON Go Green at Work campaign to secure action plans from employers.

# Low pay, poverty and targeting social need

## ■ Social inclusion and eradicating poverty

UNISON play a key role in the campaign to eradicate poverty and we continue to work with our allies including CAJ, the NI Anti-Poverty Network, the Cliff Edge Coalition, and the Child Poverty Action Group. The pandemic has both highlighted, and further deepened, poverty for many of our members and the most deprived groups and communities.

### Poverty in NI

- 60% of individuals in NI have an income below the UK median income of £547 per week. The NI median income is £506 per week.
- 60% of individuals in NI have an income below the NI mean income of £571 per week;
- income inequality (the gap between the highest income and lowest income households) is 28%;
- 15% of individuals in NI live in relative poverty after housing costs, with 12% living in absolute poverty;
- 22% of children in NI live in relative poverty – this rises to 26% in North Belfast, West Belfast and Foyle constituencies;
- 17% in NI live in absolute poverty;
- 10% (44,000) of children and 7% (74,000) of working adults in NI live in households that are food insecure;
- 162,000 working-age adults in NI are in relative poverty before housing costs were factored in;
- 10% of working-age adults in NI are in working families living in relative poverty;
- 44% in NI live in families where no one has paid employment.

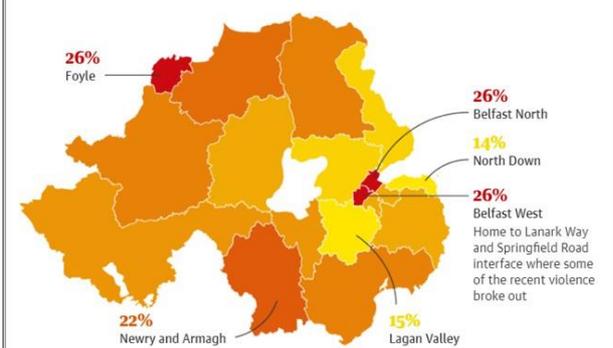
We are concerned that the end of the Job Retention Scheme will result in an increase in redundancies. This, coinciding with the £20 per week cut to Universal Credit in October 2021, will hit lower income families and households the hardest. We support calls to maintain the Universal Credit uplift.

**The strategies:** The New Decade, New Approach agreement committed the Executive to bringing forward new strategies on social inclusion. In March 2021, the Communities Minister, published reports from 4 'Expert Advisory Panels' to help inform the development of a series of new social inclusion strategies for NI. The reports contain far reaching recommendations, which, if enacted, provide a blueprint to help transform NI into a more equal, rights-based society.

The report recommendations should inform the development of the Executive's strategies on anti-poverty, disability, gender equality, and sexual orientation. It should be noted that the Race Strategy was already in place and is halfway through its timetable. We consider this strategy to be inadequate to meet our members' needs and we are calling for a revised strategy through the Equality Coalition.

The Department has established 4 co-design groups. ICTU is represented on all 4, with the UNISON Policy Officer John Patrick Clayton representing ICTU on the Anti-Poverty Group. The trade unionists and other civil society representatives are striving to ensure that the expert recommendations are fully incorporated into the final strategies.

More than a quarter of children in two Belfast constituencies and in Foyle were in relative poverty in 2019



The strategies themselves are scheduled to be adopted by the end of 2021. Although in principle they are already agreed in NDNA, they will still require agreement from the NI Executive. This will be another test as to whether the Executive can function in delivering rights, or whether the whole process will be derailed.

**Anti-Poverty Strategy:** The Anti-Poverty Strategy Expert Advisory Panel report is clear that the Strategy must be based on the social and economic rights in UN human rights conventions and the Social Development Goals. Key recommendations are to:

- Base the strategy on a definition of poverty that refers to social as well as material needs. This definition should be easily expressed as a measurable standard of living, below which no-one should fall.
- Ensure the strategy has policies to eradicate destitution, hunger, and ‘severe’ poverty, including homelessness. No adult or child should be excluded from emergency funds or food provision because of a ‘hostile environment’ immigration policy.
- Introduce a duty to reduce child poverty with targets and timetables. Also include a duty to review plans and progress against targets every five years.
- Make discrimination in goods, facilities, and services unlawful on grounds of socio-economic status and age.
- Introduce a ‘poverty proofing’ socio-economic statutory duty on public bodies when making strategic decisions (as per the Equality Act in GB).
- Establish an Anti-Poverty Commission (based on the Scottish model) to monitor progress on reducing poverty and income inequality; promote the reduction of poverty and income inequality; and advise the Executive on any poverty matter.
- Regularly quantify total ‘objective need’ by auditing the ‘costs of poverty’ and estimating the expenditure required to end household poverty.
- Introduce a new weekly ‘Child Payment’ of between £12.50 and £15 for 0-4 year olds and 5-15 year olds in receipt of free school meals. Permanently end the ‘bedroom tax’, ‘two child rule’, benefit cap, and five-week wait for universal credit.
- Make participation in school cost-free through a number of measures, including offering free school meals over holidays and expanding Sure Start provision and breakfast and homework clubs.
- Reverse the trend of families in poverty being housed in the private rented sector and regulate this sector.

**Cliff Edge Coalition:** UNISON supports the Cliff Edge NI Coalition campaign calling for the extension of welfare mitigations



To date, the promised legislation has not been tabled, once again due to the failure of the Executive to agree. UNISON has written to the First and Deputy First Ministers insisting that legislation is brought forward urgently. If not:

- over 900 household currently will continue to have no protection from the benefit cap. These are all households with children and are losing an average of £200 per month;
- the 365 households who have lost their protection from the “Bedroom Tax” will continue to lose an monthly average of £50.
- legacy claimants who have not yet been moved to Universal Credit are more likely to lose out on any future protections for loss of legacy benefit as their circumstances change.

We wish to avoid further ‘cliff edges’ and want to see mitigations extended indefinitely. While the Minister has committed to a review of the mitigations package, political disagreement stands in the way.

**NI Anti-Poverty Network:** Thomas Mahaffy, Head of Organising, remains on the Board of the NI Anti-Poverty Network and chaired its AGM in May. At the AGM Goretta Horgan, NIAPN & Ulster University; Martina McAuley, Housing Rights; and Dr Ciara Fitzpatrick, Ulster University spoke on the issues of welfare reform, housing rights and the two-child limit respectively.

The Board is currently in the process of identifying new funding opportunities and a work programme has been developed.

**Childcare:** Twenty-one years into devolution there is still no childcare strategy, but two decades of excuses from Government. The 2017 ICTU report ‘Childcare in NI – cost, care and gender equality’, makes comprehensive recommendations and has been the basis of our engagement with Government and our bargaining agenda with employers.

In September 2021 the Economy Minister announced that the Department of Education is now refocusing on a Childcare Strategy with the launch of a Strategic Insight Programme - consulting key stakeholders on objectives, priorities and key deliverables. UNISON will engage with this Insight Programme.

The Department reports that in the year to March 2021, £30.5m had been used to support childcare providers through a number of support schemes.

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



We are working to protect our members working in childcare settings who now face either reduced hours or possible redundancies as a result of the ending of the Job Retention Scheme.

## ■ Working with the community & voluntary sector

We continue to work with NICVA, the umbrella organisation for the community and voluntary sector. Our engagement is primarily through the Equality Coalition; a number of ad-hoc groups dealing with the post-Brexit impact; and as a social partner with ICTU.

In May 2021 the Executive agreed £220 million of Covid funding to support the social recovery from Covid. This was allocated across the health service, education, the arts, charities and sports organisations.

The Department for Communities was allocated £50.3m to help provide support to the people, communities and sectors who have been directly impacted by the pandemic. Allocations included:

- £10 million to Councils to ensure the continued delivery of local public services;
- £3 million to Council-managed community development and advice services via the Community Support Programme;

- £13 million to Arts, Culture and Heritage to support ongoing recovery within the sector;
- £5 million to the Sports Sustainability Fund to help alleviate the ongoing effects of the pandemic on sporting bodies;
- £5 million to support charities and social enterprises facing continued financial difficulties;
- £12 million to the Department’s Restart scheme, which supports older people in returning to employment;
- £1m for food interventions
- £0.8m to support towns and city centres;
- £0.5 million for IT support.



Our campaign of opposition against cuts to the **Supporting People Programme** continues. Over the past year, we have met with the Communities Minister and the NI Housing Executive to raise our concerns with its funding. Our interventions have resulted in the Department asking the NIHE to undertake a 'feasibility study' of alternative funding models for the programme.

In July, we presented our concerns to the Assembly Communities Committee. This included personal testimonies from workers.

We made the case that any additional funding or procurement model to fund Programme providers, which we believe is necessary, must be translated into better pay and terms and conditions for workers on a par with NHS workers carrying out the same or similar roles. We are pressing for full engagement with the NIHE and Department on the development of alternative programme funding options in line with our campaign objectives.

## UNISON campaigns in health and education

### ■ Health and social services

Last year's report to Regional Council covered in detail the intensive engagement of the entire UNISON team at employer, departmental and government level. That engagement continued throughout 2021 and has included the following policy interventions identified in our formal submissions and in direct meetings with Government and across the health system:

- continuous representation to the Health Minister calling for caution in the lifting of pandemic restrictions;
- our call for priority attention to be given to the latest Covid outbreaks in care homes;
- opposition to the proposal to make vaccination mandatory for private sector care workers as counter-productive;
- challenging the proposals on a new duty of candour;
- challenging the transparency and accountability of the current health service management board;
- making extensive UNISON proposals on the closure of the HSCB and the introduction of an integrated care system;
- responding to the proposals on the drug and alcohol strategy;
- challenging the absence of proper consultation on key decisions, including the mental health strategy.



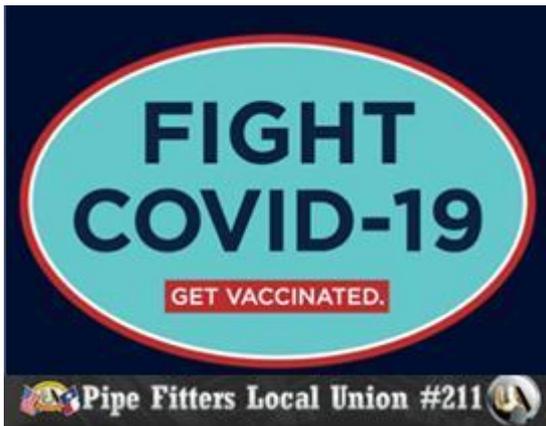
In our most recent meetings with the Minister we have:

- expressed our concern at the growing encroachment of private medicine;
- called for a halt to the increasing use of privatisation to deliver medical and nursing services;
- called for restoration of trade union engagement at the highest level including the restoration of the health service partnership;
- called for a detailed costing of our One Team 2k pay demand;
- reiterated the value of working in partnership with UNISON on the successful partnership models we have developed over the past 21 years;
- called for the new Social Care Fair Work Forum to meet before the end of 2021.

The bargaining element of this engagement is reported in Section 2

**Response to Covid-19:** We have continued at both local and regional level to ensure protection for our members who have now been confronting the pandemic for 18 months. We have continued to press for

updated health & safety guidance; the provision of proper PPE; a proper testing, track and trace system; and promotion and outreach of the vaccination programme.



Responding to the pandemic has taken a tremendous toll on our members. Our branch and Trust negotiators are increasingly dealing with dramatically depleted staffing levels, staff illness and major retention problems. The public view may be that the crisis is subsiding, but inside our hospitals the picture is one of deep anxiety and continuous stress. We have called on the health system to introduce much better support programmes and to step up recruitment. The best way to confront this crisis is to pay our members properly and introduce safe staffing legislation immediately.

Despite everything they are facing, our branches still made time to celebrate the 73<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the founding of the NHS. This is a mark of our determination to protect and

develop our health service by enshrining its founding principles. We are now living with a growing acceptance by a distressed public that they must pay for healthcare to move up the queue.

UNISON is embarking on a major campaign challenging the use of **private medicine** from public funds; questioning who is in charge of the waiting lists; and demanding to know the criteria for moving up the list. We are inviting the 350,000 people waiting for a 1<sup>st</sup> appointment and the thousands who have paid to start telling their stories as part of our campaign.



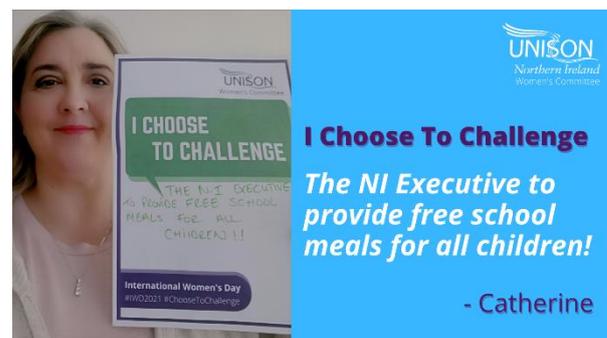
We are still pursuing the joint call from UNISON, Amnesty International UK and CAJ for a full independent public inquiry into the handling of **Covid-19 in care homes and community settings in NI**, with particular reference to the very high death rate of residents. Our position is for an independent, effective and prompt investigation in conformity with Article 2 of the European Convention of Human Rights. We anticipate that the inquiry will now extend beyond care homes and we note that Scotland has commenced its inquiry within recent weeks.

## Education

We have been extensively engaged with the Department and the Education Authority throughout the year. The immediate and intensive focus has been on the reopening of schools.

The guidance issued on the September 2021 return after the summer holidays threw the system into chaos as teaching and other education staff were not equipped to handle testing, tracking and tracing requirements. This has now been taken over by the Public Health Agency as it should have been from the start.

However, it also presents a major resource challenge to our PHA members.



In September, the Education Minister announced the panel chosen to undertake an **Independent Review of Education**. Work is scheduled to commence in October 2021 and will consider:

- the education journey and outcomes of children and young people;
- the support for schools and settings, funding and governance;
- the system level design, delivery and administration; and
- a vision of how education should be delivered in NI in the 21st century.

In September, we held an early meeting with one of the departmental officials servicing the review and working on revised criteria for free school meals. The meeting took place at the art gallery where our exhibition was on display. We set out our position on free school meals for all, and have established a communications channel with the Department. We anticipate extensive engagement with this review and will be involving our members and lay structures in developing the UNISON response. It is anticipated that the review will take 18 months, with an interim report available after 12 months.

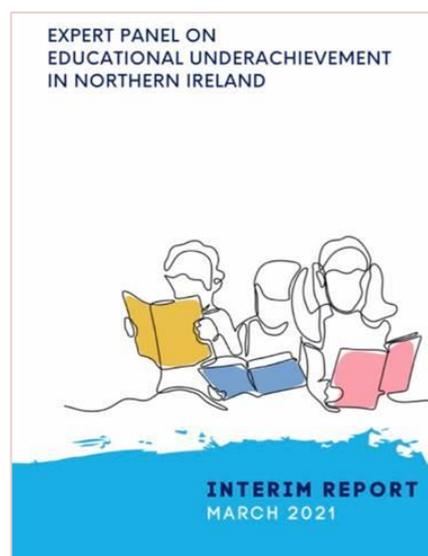
Regional Council has set the framework for our interventions, to include an education system:

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

- that ensures that future area planning processes consider workforce issues.

These principles also formed the basis of our response to the **Review of Educational Underachievement** in late 2020. In our response we highlighted our call for nutritional free school meals for all pupils; an end to academic selection, and the need to reform the Common Funding Formula to ensure that it reflects the issue of underfunding on objective need and shifts funding from 'equality of opportunity to all' to 'equality of outcomes'.

The Expert Panel made its report in June highlighting key inequalities in education and calling for action on early years; an agreed childcare strategy; family and community engagement with schools; and the specific inclusion of boys' educational attainment.



We have reported for several years on the sustained **funding crisis** facing our education services and the sustained real terms reductions experienced by schools' budgets and the growing number of schools in budget deficit. In February 2021, the Department published its **draft budget** for 2021-22 indicating that it is facing a resource funding gap of £321.3m and a Capital funding gap of £59.8m (assessed prior to the January Monitoring round). The related budget screening contained minimal details in relation to the implications for services and programmes previously provided, potential cuts, or for the impact of the budget on equality groups.

**Common Funding Formula:** In our engagement with Government, we are pressing for a new approach to the funding formula for schools that not only restores recent cuts, but targets objective need and inequality of outcomes. 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 summarise the funding system in our annual report for the benefit of branches and members.

### A guide to education funding in NI

The Common Funding Scheme for the local management of schools is the means by which the education budget is distributed. The total amount to be spent on schools is called the General Schools Budget (excluding special schools). It is made up of three specific categories of spending:

- The Aggregated Schools Budget is the total amount delegated to individual schools under the LMS common formula;
- Resources Held at Centre are amounts allocated to school budgets other than by means of the common formula (for example, for the payment of substitute teachers in certain circumstances);
- Centrally Held Resources Attributable to Schools are amounts held by ELBs for services provided to schools in their area - for example home to school transport and school meals.

The percentage of the education budget allocated to the aggregated schools budget is just over 60%. An additional 12% of the overall budget is allocated to schools from centre budgets held by the Education Authority. 13% is allocated for attributable services such as school meals.

**Special Educational Needs:** In 2020 the Department launched a new consultation on a revised SEN framework, new SEN regulations and a revised Code of Practice. UNISON met with the Department late last year and expressed our very serious concerns about some of the fundamental elements of the proposed Regulations and Code and our belief that the proposed Framework should

not be brought forward in its current form. SEN provision must be supported by levels of funding that are responsive to growing demand and which result in the needs of all children being properly met, rather than diverting children into mainstream schools inappropriately. We are firmly resisting any attempts to casualise the workforce. It is vital that the voices of the children affected and their parents are heard and acted upon.

In May 2021 the Expert Panel reported that £180m is required to be injected into the education system over the next 5 years in order to tackle underachievement, with a particular focus on early intervention, including for children with SEN.

**Area Planning:** We continue to monitor the Area Planning process. Where UNISON has substantial membership in a school that is threatened with closure, and there is demonstrable local community support for the school to remain open, we give full support to anti-closure campaigns. In campaigning for more resources for education services, we are mindful that a key consideration in area planning is a school's financial position. Our position is that schools should not be judged as unsustainable and face closure or merger in future because they have been the victims of austerity.



UNISON will continue to monitor all development proposals put forward which affect our members and will ensure their interests are safeguarded within the area planning process.

**Free School Meals For All:** During 2021, the free school meals working group, established by Regional Committee, has continued to meet to take forward the development of the campaign calling for universal free school meal provision for all children and young people. The campaign has three complementary objectives:

- seeking universal nutritious free school meals for all pupils to both reduce poverty and improve public health;
- safeguarding and promoting the vital work of our members within schools catering (school meals services should be publicly provided);
- as a response to Covid-19, building support for the implementation of a public health model across Government that is aimed at dealing with health and educational inequalities that have been exacerbated during the pandemic.

These objectives are supportive of actions being led within our bargaining structures – primarily in education, but also in health, taking into account the key public health implications of free school meals.

Since last Regional Council, the campaign has had a major impact on raising public awareness and the profile of nutritional free school meals as a poverty, equality and public health issue; has energized our members and assisted children and young people to realise their right to participate and have their voices heard on issues affecting them; and has caused politicians and policy-makers to engage with issues of poverty and child health and development.



Key campaign activities have included:

- the development of our billboard, bus shelter and bus side advertising campaign which ran as schools returned after Easter at nearly 70 different NI locations;
- the hugely successful 'All We Need is Lunch' Art Competition which had over

1800 entries and over 100 schools and youth organisations participating;

- the direct engagement of thousands of people, members and non-members alike, in the campaign through visiting the website, emailing their MLAs, and responding to our surveys on their experience of school meals; and
- direct political and policy interventions including with MLAs, Assembly Committees, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, and key public health and education officials.



As a result of the campaign, the former Education Minister Peter Weir agreed to a review of free school meal and uniform grant eligibility criteria, with the option of providing universal free school meals to all or certain year groups of pupils to be considered as part of that review. This review is due to formally commence in October and UNISON has already engaged with the Department of Education officials undertaking this review and the Assembly Education Committee at Stormont.

In a motion to 2021 Council, Regional Committee will seek to build on the successful start to this campaign and intensify its efforts to make free school meals for all a reality. It will seek to secure recommendations within the forthcoming review of school meals eligibility criteria for a move towards a universal approach to free school meals; and commitments from all political parties to implement a universal approach to free school meals provision as part of the upcoming Assembly election campaign.

In March 2021, UNISON NI launched the 'All We Need is Lunch' Art Competition as part of the wider Free School Meals campaign. Letters and materials were sent to every school and youth organisation in NI encouraging them to engage with children and young people on the issue of free schools meals, and asking them to support them to use the visual arts to explore what school meals means to them.

The competition was also supported by significant social media activity and activist engagement with members within local schools. A range of prizes were offered in 4 age categories and over 1800 entries were received from over 100 schools and youth organisations from across NI. The entries were judged by a panel of local artists and significant publicity was generated at the end of June when the winning artists and their schools/youth organisations were presented with their prizes by the Regional Secretary, organising staff and branch activists.

The winning artwork was exhibited at the Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast between 15<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> September and UNISON hosted a reception for the winning artists, their families and teachers.



The event was also livestreamed via the UNISON NI Facebook page and included contributions from the Regional Secretary; NEC member and school meals worker Catherine McKenna; NI Commissioner for Children and Young People, Koulla Yiasouma; and the Chief Executive of the EA, Sara Long.

## All we need is lunch Art Competition winners

### 8yrs and under



1<sup>st</sup> Prize  
Cal Fallis  
Irvinestown Primary School



2<sup>nd</sup> Prize  
PS SH  
St John The Baptist, Belfast



3<sup>rd</sup> Prize  
Emma Day  
Carrick PS Burren, Warrenpoint

#### Great Effort awards:

Hannah Salkiewics, Forge Integrated, Belfast; Harry O'Hare, Carrick PS Burren, Warrenpoint; Odhran McConville, Carrick PS Burren, Warrenpoint; Ciara Duffy, Steelstown PS; Katie Hamilton, Ballyoran PS, Portadown; Sorcha Mullholland, St Patricks, Aghacommon

### 12yrs to 14yrs



1<sup>st</sup> Prize  
Alex Patterson  
Foyle College



2<sup>nd</sup> Prize  
Amelie Millar  
Loreto College, Coleraine



3<sup>rd</sup> Prize  
Cillian Cranney  
Aquinus Grammar School, Belfast

#### Great Effort awards:

Jayla Harrison, Loreto College, Coleraine; Allen Jophon, St Colemans College, Newry; Aimee Kerr, Derry; Grace Keown, Shimna Integrated College, Newcastle; Bridin Nig Raine, Gaelcholaiste Doire, Dungiven; Maddie Campbell, St Marks High School, Warrenpoint

### 9yrs to 11yrs



1<sup>st</sup> Prize  
Meah Burns  
Almond Drive Residents Association



2<sup>nd</sup> Prize  
Amelia Hughes  
Meadow Bridge PS, Hillsborough



3<sup>rd</sup> Prize  
Nicole Fox  
Portadown Integrated

#### Great Effort awards:

Adam Osbourne, Forge Integrated, Belfast; Kieran Lyttle, Forge Integrated, Belfast; Amy Coey, Gaelscoil Eoghain, Omagh; Annie Magee, Tannaghmore PS, Lurgan; Bobby Whyte, Bangor Academy; Emma McCullagh, St Canices, Feeny; Holly Granville, Belfast;

### 15yrs to 19yrs



1<sup>st</sup> Prize  
Carolyn Bennett's class  
Clifton Special School, Bangor



2<sup>nd</sup> Prize  
Grace McConnell  
Loreto College, Coleraine



3<sup>rd</sup> Prize  
Brandon Magee  
Rossmar Special School, Limavady

#### Great Effort awards:

Shayna Gail Velasquez, Aquinas Grammar School, Belfast; Alexx Mulligan, Shimna Integrated College, Newcastle

## The UNISON-led partnership projects

The UNISON NI Partnership Programme is led by Thomas Mahaffy on behalf of Regional Committee and is supported by relevant branch and staff members for each project. Union / employer partnership advisor, Pamela Dooley, continues to assist this work including the delivery of a bespoke partnership training programme for managers and union activists.

These UNISON-led partnerships are focused on delivering true inclusion, real equality of decision-making and increasing opportunities for frontline workers to have a direct voice in how quality care is delivered across our health and social services.



The history, principles and objectives that have underpinned them over the past 20 years can be found in the 'Time for Change' report [www.unison-ni.org.uk/unison-led-partnerships](http://www.unison-ni.org.uk/unison-led-partnerships).

**UNISON / NIAS health & wellbeing partnership:** UNISON continues to be a driver for health, wellbeing and cultural change within NIAS and have continued to engage with members, activists, staff and managers at all levels to identify key priorities and actions.

We are currently progressing an action plan to address the specific issues that emerged from the 'Covid experience' staff focus groups that took place in summer 2020. We are also intervening to ensure that the themes and actions identified in the new NIAS 'health & wellbeing' and 'cultural improvement' strategies are aligned and have measures to tackle the work and health challenges facing staff. UNISON is advocating an oversight role for the partnership to ensure that the strategic actions within both strategies are implemented effectively across directorates.

Given the link between a 'healthy' organisational culture and the physical and mental health of staff, it is essential that both strategies have measures to challenge the historic issues of stress, low morale, poor mental health and other work-related problems

facing NIAS staff. This will require a variety of interventions, including action to increase the sense of personal control staff have over their jobs; to promote positive working relationships between staff and their managers; to increase staff engagement and participation in decision-making; to improve the psychosocial and physical work environment; and to develop a culture of collective and compassionate leadership.

Both strategies have used the findings of the 2018 UNISON staff survey to identify key themes and actions, and the continued relevance of this work was confirmed at staff focus groups facilitated by the partnership during 2020 and 2021. These key themes have been acknowledged by the senior Trust management team as requiring urgent action, and we continue to engage with NIAS to ensure that tackling them underpins their strategic approach to staff health and wellbeing.



As part of the 'cultural improvement' programme, UNISON is working with NIAS and the HSC Leadership Centre to design a leadership development course and a manager skills programme. This leadership course will be focused on ensuring that senior managers understand how their role enables the development of high-quality, compassionate and a continually improving culture. The skills programme will be focused on all managers to ensure that they have the proper communication and other skills to support the health and wellbeing of staff.

With the support of the Partnership, more than 33% of NIAS staff have accessed the NIAS Peer Support Programme. This included wellbeing calls to 518 staff members during the first surge of the pandemic between April and December 2020.

Other developments include:

- the employment of a new clinical psychiatrist to support the health & wellbeing of staff;
- the purchase of a pod to enable NIAS control staff to get a break away from their desk following emotional phone calls;
- the launch of a gym membership programme.

These activities have been additional to the ongoing work of the health & wellbeing partnership in seeking to improve relationships and communications between staff groups and with management, and to prioritise leadership and skills development as key to positive organisational change within the service. The Partnership also continues to prioritise a revitalised Women's Development Forum.

**UNISON / Northern HSC Trust support services project:** Following a delay in the evaluation of this long-standing partnership due to Covid, UNISON initiated a stand-alone engagement project with support services staff to enable them to provide feedback on their experience of the pandemic.

All Trust domestic staff, catering staff and porters were invited to join a number of Zoom focus groups during July and August 2021 to share their own stories and experiences of the pandemic. In particular:

- what has worked well, and what has not worked well for them?
- what organisational changes would they like to continue or stop?
- what was their high points and low points at work?
- what specifically should be done in readiness for a further possible surge in Covid?
- is there anything that could be done to make their working life better in the future?

The key issues identified by staff primarily focus on challenges associated with communications and information sharing; team working within and across staff groups and with supervisors; recognition and respect; health and wellbeing; and Covid health & safety. These will be progressed with senior Trust management and

will require action:

- to develop clearer communications channels, including facilities/platforms for support service staff to access emails and other Trust communications;
- to develop solutions to support staff with childcare and those requesting homeworking;
- to increase access to health & wellbeing support, including a specific network for support staff;
- to build on increased public respect for support staff;
- to reinforce the importance of managers and other staff groups recognising and respecting the work of support staff;
- to ensure proper induction/H&S training for all new staff;
- to ensure that staff and managers have sufficient training to be confident and competent in their roles;
- to ensure that there are clear H&S policies and protocols in place and that they are properly enforced.



Over the coming months UNISON will be working within the partnership to develop a plan to assess outcomes, identify remaining challenges, and ensure that the positive working relationships developed through the partnership process are maintained in the longer term.

**Projects in development:** Projects with other HSC Trusts remain at the planning stage due to the pandemic but will be progressed after Regional Council.

# Equality and human rights

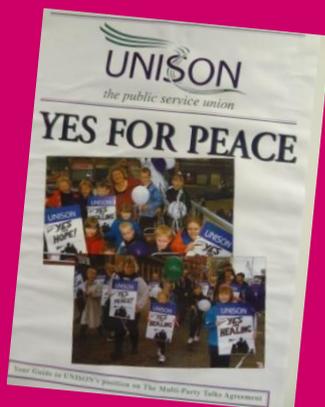
The Good Friday Agreement contained extensive commitments on equality and human rights. These permeated all 3 strands of the Agreement and the codes and operation of devolved Government. These commitments were central to UNISON support in the 1998 referendum.

The St Andrew's Agreement in 2006, while less vocal on the commitments, still retained equality as central. It also committed to a statutory anti-poverty strategy on the basis of objective need. Further Agreements such as Stormont House and Fresh Start, arising from continual political crises, have radically demoted equality and moved away from a Bill of Rights for NI thus reflecting the rollback on equality and human rights which we highlighted in previous reports.

The absence of political will to embed equality and human rights commitments as a framework for Government led to the collapse of the Executive and Assembly.

The 'New Decade, New Approach' agreement contains a range of commitments on human rights and equality strategies. Alongside our allies pressing for delivery of these commitments is a key priority of the Regional Committee.

We have reported over the years our concerns on the roll-back on equality and human rights and its direct impact on our members' jobs, rights and daily lives. Securing these commitments remains a UNISON priority.



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

**The Impact of an EU exit on equality and human rights protections, including the Human Rights Act:** The fallout of Brexit and the subsequent stance of the UK Government has only served to deepen division in our society. As set out elsewhere in this report, we are playing a full role in efforts to protect the Peace Agreement, public services and our members' rights.

The UK Government are again attempting to repeal the Human Rights Act 1998 in breach the terms of our international Peace Treaty. This, coupled with its stated intention to overturn the commitments on dealing with the legacy of the past underscores, at best, their ignorance of the centrality of these issues in this society and, at worst, its contempt for our Peace Process.

The UK continually resisted a 'level playing field' on workers' rights as part of the negotiations on a future relationship with the EU. Protecting those rights is a critical part of our agenda.

It is increasingly clear that the Government has no commitment to the equality and human rights agreements which are core to the Good Friday Agreement, and which will be seriously undermined through exiting the EU. In this context, UNISON must continue to campaign to defend the Human Rights Act and a strong, enforceable Bill of Rights for NI must be brought forward.

The promise of guaranteed human rights in a strong, enforceable Bill of Rights has been systematically blocked not only by local political parties but by successive UK governments. Its continued rejection by the UK Government (due to the lack of local political consensus) is particularly irresponsible at this point in the Peace Process. A Bill of Rights for NI could be used to protect rights based in EU law in the future, and limit the power of Government to weaken those rights. It is needed now more than ever.

The 'New Decade, New Approach' agreement provides for the first process to implement

the Bill of Rights in nearly 12 years. However, we are concerned that this process has departed from the letter and spirit of the Good Friday Agreement and could allow for the lack of political consensus to be used as a veto over implementation of a Bill of Rights. Working with our allies, in particular the Equality Coalition and Human Rights Consortium, we have presented evidence to the Ad Hoc Committee, established by the Executive, and we now await its report.

**Abortion rights:** For decades we have been part of a coalition which has campaigned; lobbied; protested; marched; researched; engaged in consultations; made presentations; listened to and published women's stories; pursued court action; and supported the cause of over 1,000 women per year being forced to travel and pay for healthcare.

The passing of the NI (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019, during the suspension of the Assembly represented a historic development on both the Right to Choose and Marriage Equality, two of the most contested issues in this society. The NI Executive continues to block progress on abortion services and the Secretary of State has set a further deadline. This follows the NI Human Rights Commission lodging of a legal challenge against the Secretary of State, the NI Executive, and NI Department of Health, for failing to commission and fund abortion services here on the grounds that it "breaches the European Convention on Human Rights", specifically Article 8 on the right to private and family life. We await the judgement.

In March 2021, the UK Government issued the Abortion (NI) Regulations 2021 to address the gaps in commissioning abortion services in NI. The new regulations give the Secretary of State a power to "direct NI Ministers and, departments or relevant agencies to implement all of the recommendations in paragraphs 85 and 86 of the CEDAW report, consistent with the conditions set out in the Abortion (NI) (No.2) Regulations 2020".

The 2021 Regulations were approved by both Houses of Parliament at the end of April 2021. In July 2021, the NI Secretary of State issued a direction to the Department of Health, the Minister for Health, the Health and Social Care Board, and to the First and Deputy First Minister, to "commission and make abortion services available in NI as soon as possible, and no later than 31 March 2022".

**Marriage equality:** Following the Love Equality submission to the NIO, which was supported by UNISON, from 7 December 2020 to 6 December 2023, couples in a same sex civil partnership can change their civil partnership to a marriage. Regional Committee congratulates all UNISON activists and our allies that fought and campaigned over many years for these rights to be realised.



**Supporting our allies:** UNISON continues to make a major contribution to the debate on equality and human rights. With the support of the Campaign Fund, we sponsor research, seminars, public demonstrations and engage in political lobbying to reverse regression and to move forward.

We continue to develop the equality and human rights agenda with our allies in the Equality Coalition; the Human Rights Consortium; CAJ; NICRE and the Migrant Centre; the Women's Policy Group and Women's Budgeting Group; and the Practice and Participation of Rights in particular, and report on key developments below.

## ■ 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. A number of these are themselves umbrella groups and the largest and most diverse is the trade union movement. There has been, and remains, no other collective voice on equality in NI; 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 strict adherence to Section 75 equality duties. The Coalition prides itself on being a consistent 'critical friend' to equality oversight bodies and public authorities. Since the restoration of power sharing in early 2020, the Coalition has been able to re-establish its strong links with the government at Stormont.

**Human rights and the pandemic:** Thanks in part to the continued support of the UNISON Campaign Fund, the Coalition has achieved considerable progress during the last twelve months in much changed circumstances. Rather than being resolved quickly as was hoped, the pandemic has continued to have a major disruptive impact on day-to-day life in NI. Throughout this time, Coalition meetings (and events) have all been held virtually to allow groups to continue to engage, and this has led to a welcome increase in average attendance. The Coalition has also striven to respond effectively to the pandemic and to counter its disproportionately negative impact on those who are most vulnerable within our society. There should be 'No going back to normal'.

Last year, the Equality Coalition teamed up with the Transitional Justice Institute and Human Rights Consortium to organise webinars examining human rights issues brought into sharp focus by the Covid-19 pandemic. Originally intended as a limited

series, the webinars continued for far longer than was originally expected. Events were held regularly from summer 2020 to spring 2021, covering a diverse range of topics. UNISON members and activists extensively engaged and the webinars have now been made available online for watching at any time via YouTube.

In July 2021, the Equality Coalition issued a joint statement urging decision makers to address inequality as part of the pandemic recovery and to abandon austerity. This statement followed on from a previous one issued by the Coalition in April 2020 on the pandemic response. The members of the Coalition called for Government Departments, and all public authorities to fully discharge their 'Section 75' obligations when developing necessary policy responses to Covid-19 to ensure they actively promote equality of opportunity and do not exacerbate inequalities. They also urged the Executive to take a range of priority actions, including ensuring the vaccine programme is accessible to all within society and committing to further welfare mitigations.



**Rights Based Return to Power Sharing:** The Coalition has continued to push for the realisation of its *Manifesto for a Rights Based Return to Power Sharing* (first published in 2019), including regular engagement with Ministers and departments. The Coalition has also briefed a number of committees, including providing evidence to the Education Committee (on the return to school) and the Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights.

Following the reappointment of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in June 2021, the Coalition released a statement urging the UK government and NI Executive to implement the outstanding rights-based commitments arising from the New Decade, New Approach agreement and other components of the Peace Process. Some of

these commitments remain unimplemented more than two decades after they were first promised. Additionally, the Coalition will soon launch a new ‘policy asks’ document, which highlights in one concise document all of these unfulfilled promises (as identified through a mapping exercise carried out by CAJ, which is available online – [caj.org.uk/2021/04/09/a-mapping-exercise-mar-21](http://caj.org.uk/2021/04/09/a-mapping-exercise-mar-21)).

**Equality enforcement:** The Coalition has continued its work on equality enforcement, at times strategically making complaints against public bodies to encourage stricter adherence to Section 75. During 2021, several Government departments and key public bodies began the process of reviewing their equality schemes. In response, the Coalition updated its best practice advice on equality schemes (which was first developed in 2016) and used this as a means by which to engage with the bodies in question. Recently, the Coalition also provided feedback to the Equality Commission for NI (ECNI) on their new draft Policy for the Provision of Legal Advice and Assistance. Our recommendations focused primarily on encouraging ECNI to use their enforcement powers strategically and proactively going forwards. The Coalition meets with both ECNI and the NI Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) on a regular basis.

**Brexit:** The Coalition has been campaigning on a range of issues that have emerged in the wake of EU exit, including the new

entitlement boundaries between different groups of citizens here and potential risks to worker rights. The Coalition is closely monitoring the implementation of the UK commitment that there will be ‘no diminution’ of certain GFA rights as a result of Brexit. Research is also pending on immigration issues.

**Hate crime:** The Equality Coalition has also been seeking to ensure the implementation of the recommendations from the Judge-led Independent Review of Hate Crime (and hate speech) legislation in NI which concluded in November 2020. The Coalition continues to support other measures aimed at reducing the levels of hate crime and hate speech.



In addition to the work outlined above, on an ongoing basis the Coalition acts as a key forum within which members can share their campaigns, gain support from each other, and seek collaboration. The Coalition will continue to address emerging equality matters impacting NI on an ad hoc basis.

## ■ Conflict and dealing with the past

The UK Government’s recent proposals on dealing with the legacy of the past represent one of the most significant threats to the Peace Process itself and negate the Good Friday Agreement and its successor agreements.

Regional Committee has submitted a motion to the ICTU 2021 Biennial Conference challenging the UK Government proposals which seek:

- to introduce a statute of limitations that would not only stop current and future criminal prosecutions, for all troubles related crimes committed before the

Good Friday Agreement, but would also bar the police and Police Ombudsman from investigating them;

- to end all other judicial activity and inquiry in relation to the legacy of the conflict, including civil cases and inquests;
- to replace them with a “truth recovery” process, but with no suggestion that its investigators could compel witnesses or disclosure of evidence, search and seize information or arrest suspects.

The UK Government has reneged on the commitment in the ‘New Decade, New Approach’ agreement to legislate within 100

days to implement the Stormont House Agreement to deal with the legacy of the conflict. The breadth and scope of this proposed amnesty has been roundly condemned by victims and survivors of the troubles; all political parties in NI; the Irish Government; and international observers. If implemented this would be one of the most extreme amnesties seen anywhere in the world since the end of WW2.

The scale of loss and human suffering experienced by all victims and survivors of the conflict, including many of our own members and their families, is immense. UNISON has repeatedly supported campaigns for truth and justice in relation to human rights abuses committed during the conflict, including support for the Ballymurphy and Bloody Sunday families, the family of Raymond McCord and for a public inquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane, as well as supporting victims and survivors in their long running campaign for a proper pension.

The clear rationale behind these proposals is to deliver on the Conservative Government's populist pledge to stop investigations and prosecutions of armed forces veterans. In

doing so this Government is disregarding the clear wishes of victims and survivors for truth and justice, regardless of the perpetrators. Should these proposals come to pass, they will further be used to obscure the human rights violations carried out by agents of the state. They also clearly conflict with the duty on the UK under the European Convention on Human Rights to effectively investigate unlawful death and torture and will undermine the Human Rights Act and the rule of law.

UNISON is calling on ICTU, in conjunction with affiliates, victims and survivors' groups and our allies across civic society:

- to actively campaign against the proposals of the UK Government and call upon it to fulfil its prior commitment to implement the measures laid out in the Stormont House Agreement in a human right's compliant manner;
- to engage with all political parties in NI; the Irish Government; UK Government and opposition; the TUC, STUC, Wales TUC; and the international labour movement in taking forward these objectives.

## Bill of Rights and Human Rights Consortium

UNISON is represented on the Human Rights Consortium Board by Thomas Mahaffy, Head of Organising & Development.

**Bill of Rights:** On International Human Rights Day (December 2020) the Consortium, alongside its 165 members, launched the #MakeOurFutureFair campaign which seeks the delivery of the long overdue Bill of Rights for NI. As part of this campaign, HRC held a series of workshops and engaged with over 200 members of the public on how they could get involved in responding to a new survey on the Bill of Rights conducted by the NI Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights which includes the five main political parties in NI. The Committee was established as part of the NDNA Agreement with a mandate to consider the creation of a NI Bill of Rights.

In April the Committee reported that 80% of respondents believe that a Bill of Rights for NI is important or very important, and 61% feel that not everyone in NI enjoys the same access to basic human rights – primarily due to discrimination and inequality.



The Committee also released a report in June stating that an overwhelming majority of participants were eager for a Bill of Rights to be actionable, forward-thinking, accessible and centred around equality. The most commonly discussed rights focused on disability, access to healthcare, mental health, education, housing, social security, language, equality and freedom from discrimination.

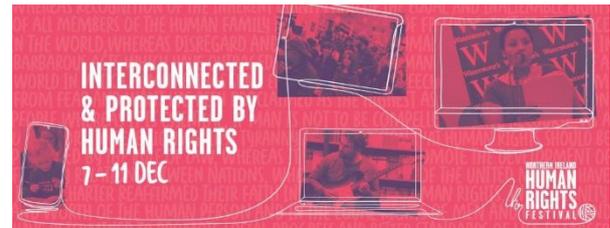
In June, HRC collaborated with Ulster University and Queens University to publish further polling that also found significant cross-community support for the inclusion of a range of rights in a Bill of Rights for NI. It demonstrated that factors such as Brexit, conversations concerning the future of NI, and the challenges of the pandemic have increased support for a Bill of Rights. More than 83% felt that the right to an adequate standard of physical and mental health should be protected in law through a Bill of Rights.

As part of International Women's Day, the Consortium organised an event looking at what a Bill of Rights means to women from the protestant, unionist and loyalist communities. The event debated historical support for the Bill of Rights and whether in the face of a global pandemic, its time has finally come.

The Consortium has published briefing papers on the [NI Protocol](#) and the [Trade and Co-operation Agreement](#); continues to engage with the NI Executive, NI Office and Department of Foreign Affairs; and has met with the new Dedicated Mechanism heads.

In March the Consortium made a submission to the [Independent Human Rights Act](#)

[Review](#) set up by the UK Government. The Consortium has serious concerns about the Government's intention in triggering a review of the HRA and believes that breaking the link between the European Court of Human Rights and the UK courts and changing the way Convention rights are applied via the HRA would clearly weaken existing rights protections in the UK and violate the Good Friday Agreement. In August 2021, HRC also partnered with the NI Electoral Commission to promote [electoral registration](#).



Between 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> December 2020, the [NI Human Rights Festival](#) ran over 30 free online events webinars and discussions focused on issues such as the pandemic; Brexit; the Bill of Rights; feminism; disability; the LGBT+ community; domestic violence; and the climate emergency. Other activities included a photography exhibition from artist Bernie McAllister; family friendly and fun activities for kids, and a virtual Pub Quiz with live comedy and music.

## ■ Participation and the Practice of Rights

UNISON NI continues to work in partnership with the Participation and Practice of Rights organisation founded by former Regional Secretary Inez McCormack. Thomas Mahaffy, Head of Organising & Development, represents UNISON on the Board. PPR works on social and economic rights issues and puts human rights principles and tools at the service of marginalised communities. PPR continues to work with UNISON branches as well as providing training as part of the UNISON regional education programme.

[Build Homes Now](#) campaigners have developed alliances with a coalition of planning and housing experts to develop a vision for a sustainable eco-village on the former Mackie's site in West Belfast. This is the biggest site of public land in the city and

is in the area of highest housing need. PPR's vision is a direct counterpoint to Belfast City Council's plans for the site, which focus on a Greenway, without any social housing.



PPR thanks UNISON members for their support in its fundraising campaign to challenge these plans and invites members to engage in its activities in connection with the site, such as its current housing exhibition at the MAC Belfast in conjunction with artist Anne Tallentire. The TCPA will also be holding

workshops with communities and statutory agencies in October. PPR has launched a survey on our plans and will be holding a major event on December 8<sup>th</sup>.

The **#123GP/Mental Health Rights Movement** launched an interactive digital map revealing significant geographic differences across NI in access to counselling. This work led directly to the Department of Health setting up a £10m fund for voluntary sector mental health projects. The campaign has recently been responding to the publication of the Mental Health Strategy, as well as continuing to promote and develop alternative models of support around mental health in line with mutual aid philosophy, including 'The Rest of the Story' programme with Michael Patrick MacDonald and 'Reasons to Stay' with Damian Gorman, delivered in partnership with the MAC.



A local **#LiftTheBan campaign** for NI was launched in late 2020. Recently campaigners have completed a survey of 125 asylum seekers on their skills and qualifications and have met with the Minister for Economy and the Minister for Communities to ask that employment policy be changed to enable asylum seekers to work. This is particularly important in the context of an asylum system which can take years to make a decision on claims. The group are also developing innovative ways to tell their stories and develop allies, including through film and interactive web platforms.

## ■ 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 is currently chaired by UNISON's Pamela Dooley and we are also represented on the Board by Local Organiser, Nathalie Donnelly.

**End Destitution** activists and allies have been campaigning against the enforced destitution of people with No Recourse to Public Funds, a cruel and inhumane policy rooted in the 'hostile environment'. The group have recently met the Minister for Communities to advocate for a devolved approach to addressing destitution, as has been seen in other devolved nations. Policy changes could include the use of specific Housing Association properties for people with No Recourse to Public Funds, as well as the declassification of Discretionary Support from the list of public funds.

**Right to Work Right to Welfare** activists continue to campaign for the implementation of the People's Proposal, a human rights checklist which can be integrated into the social security assessment system to ensure both procedural fairness and appropriate levels of benefits. The continuing need for the proposal to be adopted was highlighted by a survey of advice workers from Advice NW, EBAC, Advice NI and PPR who recorded information on the cases of 192 people. The results were published in 'Sounding the Alarm: Advice Workers Fear for Clients' Rights in a Broken Security System' and demonstrated a lack of transparency and fairness as well as a system unable to deliver the minimum essential levels of benefit to meet people's needs.

PPR have supported the formation of **Making Rights Real** – an organisation seeking to use a human rights-based approach with marginalised communities across Scotland. Making Rights Real is now a constituted organisation with funding and is undertaking scoping work to identify communities interested in taking forward the approach.



### **EUSS Settlement Scheme Support Project:**

MCNI, in partnership with Advice NI, is supporting vulnerable EU citizens who need additional help when applying for their immigration status through the Home Office EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS). The Centre continued to provide full end-to-end support with EUSS applications through clinics, drop-in sessions, appointments, home visits and information sessions. MCNI staff speak a total of 11 languages and it has also provided information events, support for employers, support for schools and parents and cooperation with EU Consular services.

**Migration Justice Project:** MCNI is funded through the Justice Together Initiative to undertake policy work, advocate and lobby for migrant rights and for a just immigration system. Its advocacy work is informed by the lived experiences of service users and it engages at the NI and UK levels. MCNI also engages in gender justice advocacy, lobbying, and policy in partnership with WRDA. It is represented on the Women's Policy Group NI and the National Women's Council's All-Island Women's Forum.

The **Coolcullen Meadow Project**, resourced by Apex Housing, ended in February 2021. Based in the Coolcullen Meadows Housing Estate in Fermanagh the project engaged with BAME families, Irish traveller families and settled local community families to build relationships.

In response to feedback received from EUSS clients availing of its **Hate Crime Victim support project**, MCNI applied for 3-year funding under the Community Fund people and communities programme to deliver the NI-wide **Financial Health and Well-Being project** from March 2021. It provides culturally sensitive, bilingual support to migrant and BME individuals facing severe financial hardship who need to reduce their debt; maximise their income; and/or access benefits or other services, related to their financial dependence.

Clients had indicated that many in the migrant community were struggling with:

- loss of work or hours;

- difficulty navigating the benefits system due to language and cultural barriers;
- Covid-19 situation which has increased economic precarity and language and cultural barriers;
- additional vulnerabilities, such as physical/mental health problems and domestic violence, exacerbated by Covid-19 and a lack of nearby family ties or social support.

Information sessions on managing finances and switching suppliers have been held in Bulgarian, Czech/Slovakian, Hungarian, Syrian and Romanian. Some of the key issues facing clients to date have included Universal Credit claims; tax credits; employment and furlough issues; landlord negotiation; PIP and ESA forms and support; and Child Benefit, debt and disability issues.



The **Race Hate Crime Advocacy service** is a victim focused service and provides one to one support for victims of race hate crimes and incidents across NI, employing two part-time advocates, both bi-lingual. The Project encourages and supports members of the community to report hate incidents/crimes as a victim or witness, and supports them throughout the criminal justice process to access information and relevant support. The service works in partnership with the PSNI, Department of Justice, Victim Support, Rainbow Project and Leonard Cheshire NI.

The Hate Crime Advocacy project has engaged with the Independent Review of hate crime legislation in NI led by Judge Desmond Marrinan as a member of the Key Stakeholder group, and are also part of the PPS Stakeholder Forum, and have engaged with the DOJ on the ongoing process of consultation on the proposed Victims of Crime Commissioner.

## ■ Women at work and in society

**Women's movement:** 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 support the many campaigns and initiatives challenging and highlighting the all-pervasive discrimination faced by women in our society. As a trade union, we also bring the issue to the table of Government, public bodies and employers. Eliminating sex discrimination was a key UNISON demand for supporting the return of devolved Government.

We are members of, or support the work of, 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 are highlighting in this year's report.



**The Feminist Recovery Plan:** Regional Committee and our regional Women's Committee fully support the recommendations in the Feminist recovery plan developed by the Women's Policy Group. This was updated and relaunched in July 2021.

The Plan recognises that women in NI have suffered immensely due to a decade of austerity, and any Covid-19 recovery cannot come to the detriment of women's equality and economic well-being. The full report can be found on the WRDA website. The Plan calls for decision-makers across the UK to take action to ensure a gender-sensitive response as we transition from crisis response to recovery.



Not only does this crisis have a disproportionate impact on women, but that impact is worsened for women from particular backgrounds: for instance, black and racialised women, disabled women, women with caring responsibilities, and LGBT women.

**Impact of conflict on women:** We continue to press the UK Government to include women in NI in its action plans for the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 on women in conflict. This will again be one of our core demands in our forthcoming UNISON manifesto for the NI Assembly elections.

**ILO C190 against violence and harassment in the world of work:** Through ICTU and in partnership with the TUC we continue to press the UK Government to ratify ILO Convention 190. The NI Executive has already confirmed to the UK Government its agreement to ratification, following extensive lobbying.

**International day for elimination of violence against women:** We are again supporting this global event on 25<sup>th</sup> November with a range of actions through UNISON and ICTU. Regional Council and at ICTU Biennial Conference male delegates are invited to wear white ribbons in opposition to violence against women.

### ILO Convention 190



**IT CAN CHANGE LIVES**

Campaign for the ratification of C190 and the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work.

**#C190**  
**#ITCANCHANGELIVES**

# Solidarity

## ■ UNISON Solidarity Group

The Solidarity Group has expanded and our programme to encourage more branch international officers continues. We also continue to highlight to branches the importance of affiliating to, or renewing affiliation to Justice for Colombia (JFC), Trade Union Friends of Palestine (TUFPP) and the Cuba Solidarity campaign.

The members of our UNISON NI Solidarity Group continue to be deeply involved in a wide variety of initiatives which have increased during lockdown. We continue to host a range of UNISON activity through social media platforms, including seminars and film nights. We also continue to be involved in other global solidarity work through our Group, our self-organised groups and branches including:

- specific support from our Women's Committee for women in Turkey and Afghanistan;
- continued involvement in campaigns to support refugees and asylum seekers;
- continued support with humanitarian aid in zones hit by conflict or natural disasters;
- continued work on climate change and a sustainable environment; and
- participation in the Clean Clothes Campaign and Labour Behind the Label.

**ICTU Global Solidarity:** We are represented on the ICTU Global Solidarity Committee, and have recently requested that ICTU open nominations to NI affiliates for the Global Solidarity Committee which reports directly to the Executive Council.

## ■ Palestine

Our Solidarity Group and the majority of branches continue to support TUFPP as our main vehicle for delivering solidarity actions in support of the Palestinian people. Solidarity initiatives include continuing support for projects in Aida camp in the West Bank; a major fundraising campaign to support the people of Gaza in their struggle against the pandemic; and protest action against the recent Israeli attack.

We now have an experienced pool of trade union Ambassadors who have been promoting justice for Palestine and the BDS campaign throughout NI, at branch meetings, fringe meetings at trade union conferences and solidarity events. The following branches have provided Ambassadors who have all been part of the TUFPP Ambassador delegations:

- Belfast Education
- Down Education
- Newry & Mourne
- NI Ambulance
- Orchard
- RVH & Muckamore
- South & East Belfast Health.

Further branches have indicated willingness to take part in the Ambassador programme. The 2020 and 2021 delegations were cancelled due to Covid but it is hoped they will resume in 2022.



Throughout the year, UNISON members and staff have participated in a wide range of webinars and campaign meetings in support of Palestinian rights. In October, we participated in a solidarity event organised in support of lecturer David Miller who has now been sacked by Bristol University as a result of an intensive lobby by the Israeli government. This attack of free speech and academic freedom is a subject of a further rallying call.

**The war on Gaza:** Israeli Government forced evictions of Palestinians in East Jerusalem led to resistance, and the inevitable further onslaught on Gaza by the Israeli government. Our General Secretary, Christina McAnea, protested to the UK government calling for it to intervene on the evictions before the 2 May deadline. ICTU and many global trade union confederations publicly called for a halt to the evictions.

In May 2021, Israel renewed attacks on Gaza. International and public protest intensified with the Secretary General of the UN stating:

**“If there is a hell on earth, it is the lives of children in Gaza today”.**

ICTU Executive Council called for immediate halt to the Israeli assault, and publicly:

**“reiterated our solidarity with the people of Palestine. Our position is clear. Palestinians in Gaza and the Occupied Territories face persecution and denial of human rights by an occupying power in breach of international law. Palestinians in Israel face persecution and denial of human rights in what is now an apartheid state”.**



Despite the pandemic, people mobilised in protest around the world. Individual UNISON

members took protest action in local communities throughout NI, and TUFPP lit up Belfast with a laser light show protest at Belfast City Hall. The four TUFPP activists making this possible included the Regional Secretary and Caitlin Ni Chathail (Education Officer) who co-ordinated the event.



Regional Committee agreed to support an important project on providing therapeutic learning to young people through education services in three marginalised communities in the Gaza Strip. Other unions have now come on Board and we will jointly support the project for a 3 year period. The project is run through the Centre for Global Education.

**Trade Union Friends of Palestine:** We continue to support TUFPP with resources. The Regional Secretary is the Chair and UNISON member Eamonn McMahon is Secretary. UNISON branches and staff team members attend the main TUFPP meetings and Susan Neill (AO) and Caitlin Ni Chathail (RO) are key members of the TUFPP steering group.

**Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement (BDS):** The ICTU Executive Council has established a working group to promote action on BDS across all affiliated unions. The Regional Secretary is a member of the working group and a survey has been issued to establish the level of support and activity on BDS across the trade union movement on the island.

## ■ Colombia

Branch affiliation to Justice for Colombia (JFC) is vital to ensure that its work can continue to keep an international spotlight on the killings and to push for real action on the peace agreement.

The assassination of trade unionists and human rights activists continues at a frightening rate and threatens the Peace Process.



NEC members Margaret McKee and Ali Long promote the campaign for justice with our branches and have been part of the monitoring delegations to Colombia.

Our Head of Bargaining and Regional Secretary work through the ICTU Executive Council to promote the campaign and the Regional Secretary is a board member of JFC, representing ICTU with the Forsa General Secretary, Kevin Callanin, incoming ICTU President.



**The April 2021 general strikes:** The trade union protests over health reforms and changes in tax laws which took place in Colombia earlier this year resulted in violent attacks by the Colombian police with over 100 trade union activists shot dead, thousands of people injured and hundreds 'disappeared'. In response, JFC called on trade unions to mobilise online and lobbied the UK and Irish Governments demanding action. Our branches were encouraged to take part in online protests and ICTU, the

STUC and the TUC issued a demand that the British and Irish Governments formally denounce the violence and demand accountability for the perpetrators.

**British and Irish trade unions condemn state violence in Colombia**



British and Irish trade unions have written to the foreign ministries of both countries to condemn the intense state violence taking place in Colombia since the latest round of National Strike protests began on 28 April.

With some human rights organisations reporting up to 37 people killed so far, and hundreds more injured and detained, the unions have called for the British and Irish governments to formally denounce the violence and demand accountability for the perpetrators.

'We cannot stay silent in the face of these brutal attacks against protesters. We support the right of every Colombian to protest and to raise their voice to call for a brighter future,' says the letter signed by Britain's Trades Union Congress (TUC), the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), as well as 20 individual unions

JFC is hosting a fringe meeting at the ICTU Biennial conference in October. Reports of JFC activity can be accessed online at [www.justiceforcolombia.org](http://www.justiceforcolombia.org).

**■ Cuba**

Branches are encouraged to affiliate to the Cuba Solidarity campaign and support their actions. The UNISON delegation to the forthcoming ICTU Biennial conference has agreed to support 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;
- calling on the Irish Government to use its position on the UN Security to help end the illegal blockade.

In December 2020, we circulated the petition for the Nobel Peace prize for Cuba's Henry Reeve International Medical Brigade. More than 3700 Cuban doctors, nurses and technicians volunteered alongside health workers from 39 countries to fight the pandemic.



We continue to press the Belfast Trust to start movement in the model contract on the initiative to employ Cuban doctors and other health professionals. This was delayed due to the pandemic.

## ■ Myanmar coup and general strike

Through ICTU, we have supported the people of Myanmar in their struggle against the military coup, and in February 2021 we contributed to the Myanmar general strike fund. The Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar (CTUM), and the Myanmar Industry Craft and Service Trade Unions Federation (MICS) left the National Tripartite Labour Forum in opposition to the current administration, and a general strike took place in February 2021.



## ■ Latin America

We have renewed our affiliation to the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign. In October, UNISON activists participated in a webinar

organised jointly by Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela Solidarity campaigns.

## 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.



**Biennial Delegate Conference:** Patricia McKeown and Anne Speed were both re-elected to the Executive Council for a 2 year term ending in 2021. Archie Thompson represents ICTU retired members. The Biennial Conference scheduled for July 2021 is taking place physically and online in Belfast in October. The UNISON delegate meeting took place on 8<sup>th</sup> October. Half the delegation will be physically present in the International Conference Centre and the remaining delegates will attend via online link from the adjoining Hilton Hotel business centre. UNISON motions are on 'Protecting the Peace Agreement: Dealing with the Legacy of the Past' and 'No Going Back – Trade Unions Demand for a Rights Based Society'.

**NIC/ICTU:** The postponed 2020 Northern Conference took place online in April 2021. John Patrick Clayton and the Regional Secretary were elected to the NI Committee. Although participation was limited by technology, a significant number of UNISON delegates moved motions and spoke on others.

Both the NI Committee and the Executive Council have regular, virtual meetings and the UNISON team represents Congress on a range of groups, some established to deal specifically with the Government response to the pandemic. We continue to support ICTU campaigns including the latest 'No return to normal' campaign and we work on Just Transition in response to the climate emergency. Table 14 sets out UNISON involvement in the Congress.

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

**May Day:** UNISON hosted an online event on 6<sup>th</sup> May. The event, 'Celebrating Trade Union Victories – How we won!' centred on the NHS health strike from November 2019 to January 2020. It was chaired by the Regional

Secretary, Patricia McKeown, with contributions from Anne Speed, Head of Bargaining, and James Large, Regional Convenor. The event focused on how UNISON led the industrial action over the period, the challenges involved in strikes in health care workplaces and the successful negotiations which led to the dispute ending in January 2021.

UNISON also took part in a car cavalcade (leaving UNISON HQ Galway House and driving around Belfast City Hall) in place of the usual May Day March.



**Events and seminars:** Throughout the year, members and activists participated in ICTU virtual events, seminars and training programmes on a wide range of trade union priorities.

Table 14 - UNISON representation on ICTU structures

ICTU Structure and purpose	UNISON representation
ICTU Executive <sup>1</sup>	Patricia McKeown; Anne Speed
NI Committee, ICTU <sup>2</sup>	Patricia McKeown; John Patrick Clayton
ICTU Equality & Human Rights Group <sup>3</sup>	Patricia McKeown
ICTU Standing Orders Committee	Gabrielle Carton
ICTU Women's Committee <sup>4</sup>	Danielle McCusker (Vice Chair); Deborah Yapicioz
ICTU Health Services Committee <sup>5</sup>	Anne Speed (Chair); Patricia McKeown; Joe McCusker; Maura McKenna
ICTU Education TU Group <sup>6</sup>	Anne Speed (Chair); Heather McKinstry
ICTU Public Services Group	RMT, senior lay reps and regional organisers
ICTU Disability Committee <sup>7</sup>	Amanda Sweetlove; Marjorie Trimble;
ICTU Black and Minority Ethnic Committee	Patrick Yu
ICTU LGBT Committee <sup>7</sup>	Alexis Dickson
ICTU Retired Members	Angela Boorman, Archie Thomson
ICTU Youth Forum <sup>7</sup>	Emer Kelly; Hannah Lyttle
ICTU Education Officers Group <sup>8</sup>	Caitlin Ni Chathail
ICTU Health & Safety Committee <sup>7</sup>	Emma Jane Cullen; Ray Rafferty
ICTU Solidarity Committee	Kevin Hillick; Conor McCarthy; Eamon McMahon (TUFP)
ICTU Education alliance <sup>9</sup>	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

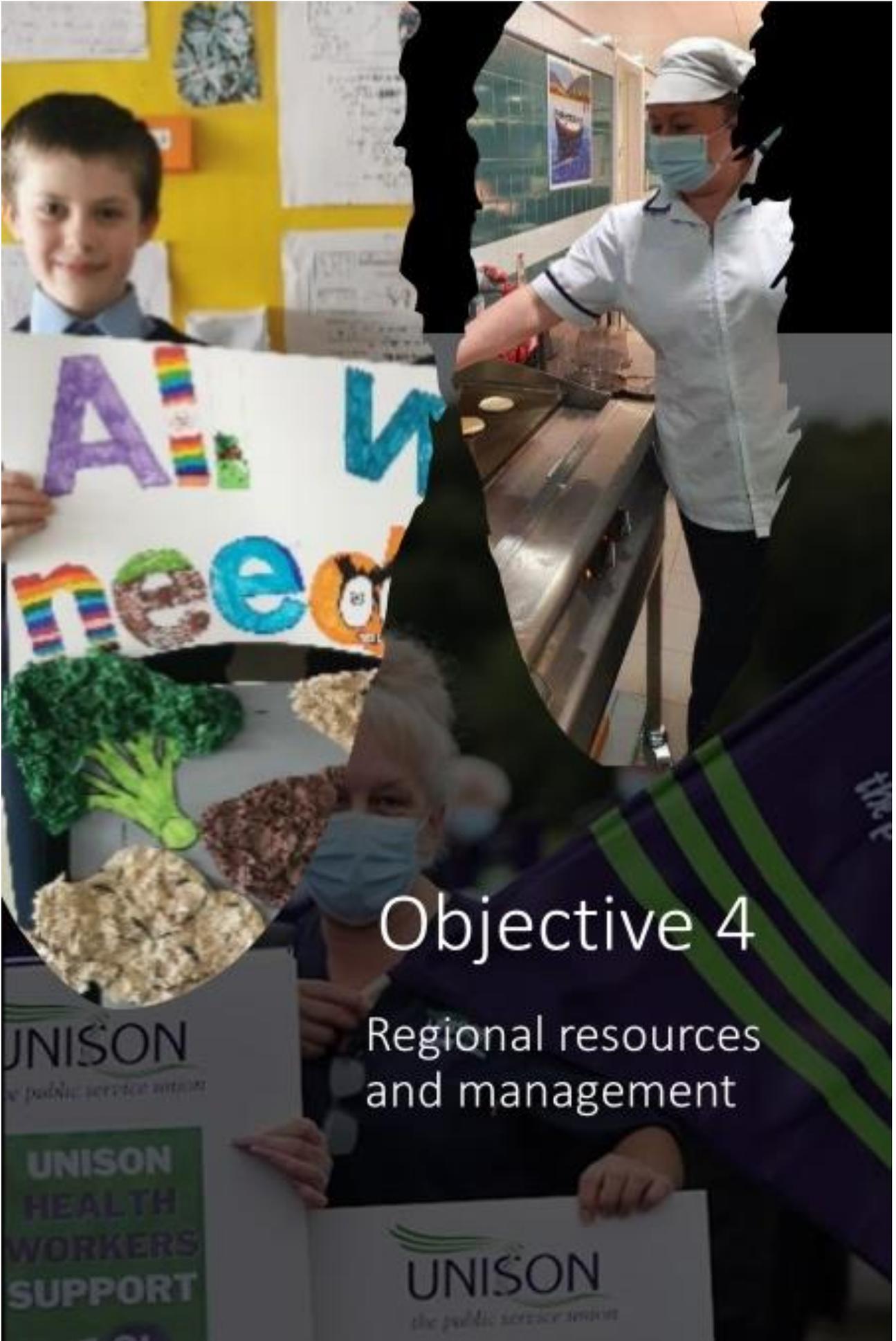
6 Main education policy committee for NI. Reports to NIC.

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 2020 will be distributed.

The UNISON NI lay activity budget for 2020 was £102,192.92. The allocation for 2021 is £104,112.00 representing a 1.9% increase on the previous year. At the start of each year the budget for all categories of lay activity is set by Regional Committee and reviewed on a quarterly basis.

The Regional Committee made a number of donations in line with UNISON policy. Where appropriate, branches are invited to support the relevant project or cause. A total of £4,807 was donated to projects through the following organisations:

- Durham Miners' Gala and Museum
- Myanmar Strike Fund
- Burma Campaign
- Community Help in Ghana
- Assist NI

- Medical Aid for Palestine
- Gaza Children's Project (Centre for Global Education)
- Alliance for Choice
- Art auction to support homeless (donated by local artists)

Regional Committee also affiliated to the following organisations:

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

The total paid in affiliation so far this year is £2000

### ■ Branch finance

The process for Annual Financial Returns (AFR) changed in 2021 and branches are now required to submit their AFRs online direct to the audit team. As a result, many branches had issues flagged before their submission was accepted within rule. These issues would not normally have been addressed until the AFRs closed. Regardless of this, all NI branches were submitted on time and within rule. As normal, regional support was available to all branch treasurers.

As a result of the pandemic, the national auditors were unable to travel to UNISON regions to conduct their normal branch audits. Six NI branches were scheduled to

be audited but the changes in how AFR's were returned in 2021 caused delays in the standard auditing process. It is anticipated that one NI branch will be audited before the end of the year.



## ■ Income and RMS

A major priority has been to monitor employers to ensure that their payroll systems continue to collect unions subs and that membership applications are processed. These are centralised functions in NI. The RMS team has successfully recovered subscription income from a number of small employers. In addition to normal data cleansing, a major exercise is underway to prepare for the Local

Government Pay Ballot. This will be followed by a similar exercise in anticipation of the health service pay ballot.

Total income returned to Head Office increased to £4,919,812.72. This represents a 12% increase on the previous year. Total income returned to branches for 2020 increased to £1,280,196. This represents a 16% increase on the previous year.

## ■ Premises

In March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic led to the closure of all UNISON offices, including the UNISON Centre in Belfast and the North West Support Centre. The offices remain closed awaiting a change in guidance from the NI Government.

**Galway House:** As a result, we have not hosted any events in Galway House since our last Regional Council. Four Seasons terminated their lease agreement with UNISON in October 2020. The redevelopment work on Galway House has been delayed due to the pandemic. However, this work will commence as soon as is feasible.

**North West Support Centre:** As a result of damp and other structural issues in the Old Church, we are actively seeking alternative premises for our North West Support Centre. We have secured a rolling lease which allows us to stay in situ, without penalty, until we find an alternative.



UNISON Centre,  
Belfast



NW Support Centre

## ■ Environmental sustainability

We continue to implement UNISON's environmental sustainability policy in the management of our premises and throughout our administrative systems. The pilot for emailing AGMs in 2020 was rolled out to all branches in 2021. The administration of this was a success and significantly reduced our carbon footprint and our printing and postage costs.

The closure of our premises has also resulted in a much smaller carbon footprint as a result of the major reduction in the use of cars, electricity and gas. We are committed to ensuring that sustainable environmental features are implemented when the re-fit of Galway House begins.

## ■ Administrative systems and front-line communication

**In-house systems and protocols:** Both regional centres remain closed as a result of government guidance. However, all staff have been fully deployed in servicing the membership and meeting targets under all 4 UNISON objectives. Our organising team has been in field for several months, carrying out

physical representation where needed and recruitment activity where we can. In most instances this has meant open air events, outside employer premises which we are currently not permitted to enter due to government and public service guidance.

For example, in recent months our team:

- supported branches in physical events such as school visits to award young artists in our free school meals campaign and at the subsequent exhibition and reception held in Belfast;
- engaged in very successful face-to-face student nurse recruitment;
- supported branches and physically attended the health service pay demonstration at Stormont;
- organised the first physical education event;
- recommended to branches that Committee meetings and Joint Branch Assessments be temporarily organised off-site to allow physical attendance;
- will be in attendance at Regional Council and the ICTU Biennial Conference.

Our organising team, in particular, is anxious to return fully to the field as soon as conditions permit. This physical engagement has run in tandem with online attendance at all lay structures, bargaining meetings with employers and political engagement with Stormont. The increased level of staff engagement with members and activists was outlined in Section 1.

Additional business continuity activities have included:

- the provision of equipment and materials to facilitate ongoing homeworking;
- carrying out Covid-19 risk assessments across all areas of our activity to identify potential hazards and control measures related to contagion spread;
- ensuring the ongoing protection of the staff team using relevant health & safety protocols and guidance;
- maintaining communications with activists and members, and ensuring their ongoing member engagement and participation, using online communication platforms and social media.

**IT equipment & systems:** We were the pilot UNISON region for the new online Office 365 and SharePoint platforms. Both were successfully implemented in late 2020 and are now being rolled out across the wider union. The IT upgrade to accompany the

migration was not completed until September 2021. We were also one of two pilot regions for ORCA, the new lay finance system that mirrors a lot of the functionalities of the previous OLBA system. ORCA was rolled out in June.

**UNISON Direct:** After a period of closure and restricted service during 2020, UNISON direct is now fully operational.

**UNISON NI Website:** The information on the rolling picture banner on the website home page continues to be updated regularly and has included immunisation and coronavirus guidance; a nursing survival guide; current campaigns; and how to access the UNISON Welfare Covid response fund, the winter fuel grant and school uniform grant.



A number of new pages and features have also been added. For example:

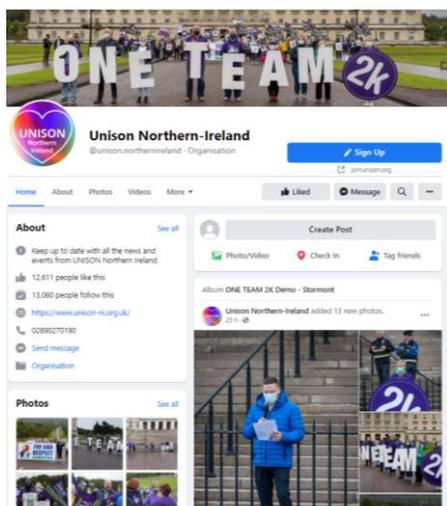
- all branch AGM documents were moved online, including a new online form for post nominations; downloadable forms for post descriptors and nominations; and branch newsletters;
- a new form was set up for the school meals art competition to enable users to email their entries in image or pdf format. The form was used 500 times to send entries and allowed us to gather all the necessary entry information;
- a new page has been set up for members interested in getting more involved in UNISON. The page titled 'Get active – become a rep' has a short contact form for members to enter their contact

details. The form is automatically emailed to the RMS team to check their membership status before filtering it to the correct organiser;

- the 'Update your details' page now includes membership rates to remind members changing their details to check if they are paying the correct subs;
- the website home page has been updated regularly with new videos including May Day greetings from the Regional Secretary, the NHS Pay Rise song, and an NJC pay Get Ballot Ready video;
- new campaign pages and sliding banners have been added for NJC pay and the One Team 2k campaign;
- the education and training page has also been updated with the latest Programme for users to view and print.

**f Facebook:** To date we have 13,060 followers on our Facebook page. This is a 24% increase from 10,489 last year. The page is updated regularly and has included information, updates, photos and videos across all our activities such as:

- the Free School Meals campaign;
- the All We Need Is Lunch Art Competition;
- International Workers Memorial Day;
- International Nurses Day;
- the 73<sup>rd</sup> birthday of the NHS;
- heavily promoting the UNISON There for You Covid Relief Fund, school uniform and winter fuel grants; and
- the many other activities and events that branches have organised for pay and other campaigns in health, education and the community and voluntary sector.



The May Day greetings video message was also posted from the Regional Secretary along with information on the Trade Union Victories: How We Won! Event. We have also shared newsletters from our self-organised groups and have encouraged members to update their membership details.

### Examples of UNISON NI social media organising and campaigning successes

For a period of three weeks, coinciding with the launch and display of billboards across NI, we ran a social media campaign around free school meals. The 1<sup>st</sup> week focused on the campaign and how to get involved. The 2<sup>nd</sup> week focused on child poverty. The 3<sup>rd</sup> week focused on children's health issues and the nutritional value of school meals. Engagement was high with a total of 62,667 people reached with posts and 3,405 people sharing or commenting on posts.

We also regularly promoted the All We Need Is Lunch Art Competition with graphics and photos on the Facebook page and announced the winners of the Art Competition in a video at the end of June.

On 24<sup>th</sup> June the NHS Pay Rise song was launched to support the One Team 2k campaign. The video was viewed over 7,500 times, reached 23,400 pages, was shared 243 times and had 391 overall reactions. On 26<sup>th</sup> July, Belfast Live shared the video on their Facebook page and this was viewed 22,700 times and had 232 reactions.

On Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> September the health branches held a day of action at Stormont for the One Team 2K campaign, a video was produced and shared on Facebook reaching 3,370 people with 566 engagements from reactions, comments and shares

With 13,060 followers we remain the most followed Facebook page of any union in NI, eclipsing the reach of other unions.

**t Twitter - @UNISONNI:** We have 3,608 followers on Twitter – a rise of 11% since last year. Over the past year we have sent 212 tweets, made 316,261 impressions on user pages, had 26,112 visits to our twitter page

and had 1,479 mentions by other pages and users. We are frequently tagged by other organisations about news and events which helps to connect people with our profile.

We have participated in many initiatives on twitter such as the #2daysfor2k UNISON hashtag for NHS Pay; and posts on International Memorial Day, with the hashtag and International Nurses Day. The International Nurses Day posts were picked up by the UNISON health team and shared in their communications.

On the #FreeSchoolMealsForAll hashtag and campaign we have shared information about how people can get involved. We posted and tagged political parties that have had meetings with UNISON about the campaign. We have also added the hashtag to all posts about the Art Competition.

**Online Platforms:** We have recently set up new online platforms for members and the public to use to email their MLAs. This includes two for the Free School Meals Campaign - one for those working in schools and another for the wider public. The

platform was then used again for the health pay campaign where users could specify if they were a HSC worker, or not, with a different letter generated for each.

As members have become familiar with this platform, the number of users who have sent letters to MLAs has steadily increased. The platform automatically populates for all MLAs in the area of your postcode. Some users will already have received responses from MLAs after sending a letter.

- Free school meals staff letter – 90 users
- Free school meals public letter – 500 users
- Health pay campaign letter – 2189 users

**Email communication with branches and members:** Our database of up-to-date email addresses and phone numbers for members continues to grow. This has proven even more beneficial during the current period with a substantial increase in the information sent out to our members by text and email.

**Distribution and print:** The amount of hard copy distribution from the regional office has reduced significantly in line with the growing use of email and social media.



# Staffing

Regional Committee records its thanks to the staff team for all their work throughout 2020/2021.

Louise O’Hara was appointed Regional Organiser in April and Claire Bolt was appointed Area Organiser in May.

In June, Caoímhe McNeill was appointed temporary Policy & Bargaining Support Organiser, and Rebekah Corbett was appointed part-time temporary Local Organiser (Research & Development).

## 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
- Tracey Bryson - Secretary (PT)
- Caroline Butler - Building Maintenance and Catering
- Anne Campbell - Team Support
- Gemma Curran - Receptionist (PT)
- Alison Downey - Receptionist (PT)
- Deirdre Graham - RMS Supervisor
- Shelley King - Secretary (PT)
- Roslyn McCartney - RMS Clerk
- Norma Neal - Secretary (PT)
- Brenda Peel - RMS Clerk
- Liz Robinson - Senior Secretary

### Specialist Staff

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

### Organising

- Claire Bolt – Area Organiser
- Marianne Buick – Area Organiser
- Nuala Conlon - Regional Organiser
- Nathalie Donnelly - Local Organiser (PT)
- Danielle McCusker - Area Organiser
- Joe McCusker - Regional Organiser
- Susan Neill - Area Organiser
- Caitlín Ní Chathail - Regional Organiser (Education)
- Louise O’Hara - Regional Organiser

