

ANNUAL REPORT



THE WORK OF THE
NI REGIONAL COMMITTEE

2024/25

Who's Who on the Regional Committee in 2024/2025

Joint Regional Convenors

Stephanie Greenwood	Health sector
Kevin Hillick	Education sector

Committee Members

Flora Alfante	Black & Migrant Workers' Group
Aine Brennan	Administrative P&T - all sectors
Samantha Bronze	Support services - all sectors, women
Caroline Cassidy	Social services/social care - all sectors, general
John Creaney	Nursing - all sectors, general
Helen Crickard	Women's Committee
Sarah Crossett	Social services/social care - all sectors, women
Allison Crummey	Nursing - women
Trevor Doey	Retired Members' Forum
Lorraine Drummond	Part time/low paid workers - health & social care
Dawn Emerson	Nursing - women
Gillian Foley	Social services/social care - all sectors, general
Irene Graham	Part time/low paid workers - education and general
Sonia Graham	Part time/low paid workers - health & social care
Kim Hall	Support services - all sectors, general
Mona Headley	Education & Local Government Service Group – low paid workers
Mary Lyttle	Health Service Group – low paid workers
Jason Magee	Young Members' Group
Pamela MacKenzie	Disability Group
Michelle McAnallen	Administrative P&T - all sectors
Alison McConaghie	Admin/P&T - women
Caroline McDaid	Support services - all sectors, general
Maura McKenna	Nursing - all sectors, general
Rachel McKinney	Part time/low paid workers - education and general
Heather McKinstry	Education & Local Government Service Group – general
Lorna McLarnon*	Young Members' Group
Anne McVicker	Community & Voluntary sector
Grainne Quinn	Admin/P&T - women
Danielle Roberts	LGBT+ Group
Beverly Simpson	Black and Migrant Workers Group
Grainne Starrs	LGBT+ Group
Anne Taggart	Women's Committee
Jill Weir	Health Service Group – women
Melanie Wright	Education & Local Government Service Group - women
Deborah Yapicioz	Social services/social care - all sectors, women

NEC Members in Attendance

Alastair Long	Health sector
Margaret McKee	Health sector
Catherine McKenna	Education sector

**Joined staff team as temporary BSOF Activity Fund LO, April 2025*

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INTRODUCTION

In the year since our previous Regional Council, a further 6000 workers have chosen to join UNISON NI. By the end of 2025, this will have increased well beyond the annual target set by Regional Council. This is an enormous tribute to the partnership work of our members, elected branch reps and the UNISON staff team.

Regional Committee is proud of the success we are achieving in developing a new generation of committed trade unionists. This could not happen without the hard work and determination of the current generation of activists and their support for our Organising to Win initiative; our superb UNISON College; our bargaining successes; and our strong participation in so many campaigns designed to make life better for our members and their families.

We still face enormous challenges. Once again, we have been let down by our politicians who have broken pay parity for health workers, despite pledging that it would never happen again. As we come to this year's Regional Council, we are again preparing for an industrial action ballot across the whole health and social services system.

We have also been let down by the NI Executive which, after 26 years, should have produced a real strategy to tackle poverty. Instead, it has produced a pathetic plan that is not fit for purpose. We will continue to put as much pressure as possible on our politicians to deliver the promises they made.

While we agree that more money is needed to develop our public services; put right what is wrong, particularly in health and education; and show respect to public service workers, this cannot be used as an excuse.

We want the books opened and we want to see where the public money is really being spent. We are very clear that the ultimate paymaster – the UK Government – needs to come up with a much better settlement for NI.

Before they left office, the Tories finally admitted that we had been under-funded for years with insufficient resources to meet the needs of the people here. We are challenging the UK Government to come forward with a better settlement if our Peace Process is ever to be consolidated.



Regional Committee is confident that we have the full support of our General Secretary Christina McAnea in a direct challenge to the UK Government to play fair with us. This is a key reason why we have nominated her in the forthcoming election.

Some of our members are facing terrible times. It is inconceivable that 27 years into our Peace Process we have members living and working in fear as rising racism targets them.

We are profoundly disappointed that our Government has not acted to protect them. We are very concerned at the fake news and incitement to hatred that is being peddled through social media and used to target them in their homes, in their workplaces and even in public spaces.

As trade unionists we have the courage to stand up against those who foster fear and division in our society.

We will continue to press Government for direct action, and to work with employers and public services to eliminate discrimination and champion human rights. We are UNISON. We stand up to bullies, no matter where they are at home or abroad.

Regional Committee pays tribute to our members and activists who have courageously stood up for our members who are being deliberately targeted.

We pay tribute to our members and activists who are courageously standing up against Genocide.

We also we pay tribute to our members and activists who stand up against the daily humiliations of many other of our members at work, or suffering from violence at home, or struggling with caring responsibilities.

We are the UNISON family. When we stand together, we can make the world a better place.

*Patricia McKeown,
Regional Secretary*

*Stephanie Greenwood,
Joint Regional Convenor*

*Kevin Hillick,
Joint Regional Convenor*



UNISON OBJECTIVES & 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 2024.

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 challenges facing us over the period.

The UNISON NI Plan 2025

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 to Win and member engagement programme.



OBJECTIVE 1:

BUILDING OUR UNION





Organising to Win

THE SUCCESS OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE RECRUITMENT & ORGANISING PLAN

UNISON has always recognised that our power and ability to influence Government and employers is directly related to the collective strength of our membership and their direct involvement in our union.

This is why recruitment, retention and building the union through strong and effective organising has remained a core UNISON NI priority for over 30 years.

This section of the Annual Report details the strategies, approaches and activities that have underpinned the Regional Committee Recruitment and Organising Plan to the end of 2024 and during 2025 to date.

It also highlights the significant organising and bargaining outcomes that have been achieved. These include:



- Above target recruitment & growth
- Record full membership
- Increased member engagement, participation and activism through successful organising approaches
- Effective alignment of our organising & bargaining strategies to achieve real wins for members across all sectors

Our Plan

Organising – A UNISON priority for 30yrs

Organising to Win

1. Purposeful organising
2. "One UNISON" priorities
3. Member participation
4. Consistent best practice

The new Branch Support and Organising Fund



Genuine partnership between the staff organising team and activists



Strong union at workplace and branch level with Organising to Win built-in



Maximising our visibility, activity & profile to recruit, retain & increase density



Maximising member engagement & participation and building networks of new, trained & active stewards



Organising strategies linked to local and regional bargaining, representation & campaigning activity and wins



UNISON College NI – a key organising resource

Direct engagement

- Face to face recruitment, workplace visits, direct recruitment initiatives

Recruitment plans linked to campaigns and bargaining activity & wins

- Pay, privatisation, cuts, H&S
- Public policy campaigns
- Workers' rights
- Equality & human rights

Infill & special initiatives

- BSOF/OtW – private social care, non-EA schools, Pay Fair for Patient Care, Activity Fund
- Key groups in health & education
- Student nurses, cleaners, catering staff

A number of factors informed the development of the 2025 Regional Committee Plan and have contributed to our recruitment and union-building success over the year.

① We understand and are responding to the organising challenges facing us: The 2025 Plan was developed with an understanding of the external and internal challenges currently facing the union. These include an ongoing funding and staffing crisis; an activist base and organising model under pressure, as we expand into new strategic growth areas with limited activist cover; and the priority of retaining the huge influx of new members who joined UNISON during industrial action.

② We are building on our past successes: Over the past 10 years UNISON NI has grown by 43% and, when developing our Plan, we made sure to build on those best practice organising, bargaining and campaigning strategies that have proven so successful for us in the past.

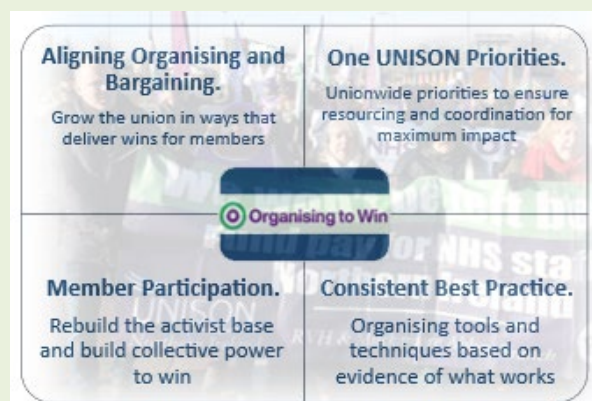


③ We are integrating union-wide initiatives such as Organising to Win and BSOF into our day to day organising approach and activities: During 2025 we embraced the union's new Organising to Win (OtW) strategy; progressed related OtW projects in private social care, non-Education Authority schools and Pay Fair for Patient Care re-banding; and utilised the Branch Support and Organising Fund (BSOF) initiative to support our organising objectives. Through these initiatives we are integrating as many everyday organising approaches, methods, tools and best practice as possible into the day-to-day activities of our staff and activist teams.

This organising approach complements existing UNISON NI strategy, and during 2024/25 Regional Committee has continued to promote OtW best practice at regional and branch level. In the coming months the new OtW Branch Vision project will also be rolled out. This initiative is focused on building a strong and functional union at workplace and branch level through a programme of organising activity incorporated into the everyday running of branches.

Organising to Win

Organising to Win (OtW) is UNISON's strategy to build a bigger, stronger and more powerful union. It has 4 key cornerstones:



Our OtW 'One UNISON' priority projects in private social care and non-EA education are resourced by the Branch Support and Organising Fund and continue to deliver significant recruitment, organising and bargaining outcomes. The private social care project also continues to support the active participation of our Black and Migrant workers who make up a high proportion of staff in the sector.

Full details on progress across these initiatives is detailed later in this section. Head of Organising Thomas Mahaffy and Regional Education Organiser Officer Caitlín Ní Chathail remain members of the OtW project board.

④ Our activist and staff teams continue to work in genuine partnership: Key to the success of our organising approach has been the close working relationships and genuine partnership working that exists between our activist and staff teams. This combined effort has been core to maintaining what are generally healthy, functioning branches in NI and a strong organising union at workplace and branch level.

One example of this partnership approach is our full-day Joint Branch Assessments. Facilitated by regional staff and led by our activists, these full day planning sessions are an effective decision-making forum for building branch and workplace organisation.

They involve activists and staff working together to develop a branch plan and reorganised branch agendas that have purposeful organising approaches built in, as well as the necessary resources to deliver organising goals.



Partnership working is also enhanced by the regional staff team continuing to provide a wide range of centralised services to branches from financial advice and support, to the production of branch newsletters and the processing and tracking of all application forms and subscriptions.

⑤ We are ensuring that our organising and retention strategies are aligned to local and regional bargaining, representation & campaigning activity and wins: Our organising experience tells us that the most successful recruitment and organising strategies are those that are linked to local, regional and UNISON-wide campaigns and successful bargaining and representation wins.

In recent years we have been able to maximise the recruitment and organising potential of our ongoing pay campaigns, ballots and industrial action in health and education. During 2025 we have continued to build those links and have secure membership increase through specific member-focused organising, bargaining and campaigning activities that prioritise engagement with thousands of our members and potential members in face-to-face meetings across workplaces, all the while publicising our many successes.

Such activities that have secured membership increase in 2025 include:

- our Pay Max/Pay Fair for Patient Care campaigns that have secured £multi-million settlements and upgrades in health;
- our pay campaigns in health and education, including our demand for a living wage across all sectors, including private social care;
- challenging cuts to government funding to the community & voluntary sector;
- challenging the impact of cuts on services, including unsafe staff levels, vacancies, and casualisation;
- bargaining for recognition agreements, particularly in private social care, non-Education Authority schools and the community and voluntary sector;
- progressing our public policy campaigns in areas such as Free School Meals for All, workers' rights, welfare reform, and our anti-poverty work;
- negotiating on equality and health & safety issues and, most recently, on agreements to protect our black and migrant workers from rising racism and racist attacks;
- challenging underfunding from the UK Government and the consequent NI Executive budget, as it impacts on our members and services; and
- our continuing campaigns to promote equality and human rights.

Sections 2 and 3 of this report detail our other campaigns in areas such as women's rights, children's rights and patient's rights that have encouraged more workers to join UNISON and that have also expanded our role in community activism.

⑥ We are prioritising member engagement & participation activity to build our networks of new, trained & active stewards: An active steward in the workplace is one of the most important factors influencing our ability to recruit and retain members and to make our organising success sustainable.

As a result, Regional Committee and the staff team continue to support branches to increase their stewards base; fill core branch committee posts; ensure that reps are properly elected, trained and mentored; and ensure that reps are supported to be active across key functions – particularly recruiting, representing, and encouraging the participation of members around the workplace issues important to them and their colleagues. This forms a core part of our OtW strategy.



Since 1 October 2024, our organising programme has resulted in 88 new stewards elected and 205 training places being taken up across our Organising Stewards programme. The challenge remains to increase cover across all areas and to retain the workplace leaders who emerged during industrial action. Mentoring and ongoing support is key.

⑦ UNISON College NI is central to the success of our Organising Plan - building power in workplaces and supporting all our organising activity. During 2025 UNISON College NI has:

- delivered base organising skills training to regional staff and nearly 200 activists;
- delivered OtW branch development training to branches across NI;
- developed online organising tools & digital platforms to attract new joiners and encourage member involvement on workplace issues; and
- organised 2000 members through our trade union education and learning programmes – a sustained majority with negotiated time-off.

- continued a major organising project offering bespoke workplace-based learning sessions with hundreds of members coming together and completing elearning sessions over lunch breaks, again with paid time off for members to participate.

⑧ We are focused on building a strong union at workplace and branch level with organising, monitoring & evaluation built-in: During 2025, a core priority for Regional Committee has been to maintain strong, functional and healthy branches in NI through OtW training as well as integrating best practice organising approaches into the day-to-day work of branch and staff teams. This training has included the roll-out of full-day branch development days across all branches, in addition to our usual full-day branch assessments.

Branches are increasingly recognising the benefits of this approach at workplace level and that UNISON's power and influence comes from the collective strength of our members.

Branch priorities include:

- working to a detailed organising strategy to build member participation, monitored on a monthly basis through branch plans;
- being seen in every workplace, increasing membership density, and identifying the right collective issues to organise around;
- identifying natural leaders and encourage activism;
- keeping our profile high so that members can see the benefits of membership;
- ensuring high standards of representation, bargaining and campaigning;
- being willing to organise and follow members at risk of privatisation; and
- if necessary, being ready to build member participation and power within an escalating plan to achieve specific bargaining wins.

During 2025 this type of union-building activity and use of best practice organising skills and techniques has been championed by our BSOF/OtW projects in private social care, non-EA education and on Pay Fair for Patient Care re-banding. They will be rolled out across all branches as part of the 'Branch Vision Project'.

The importance of target setting, monitoring and evaluation are also being taken forward at branch committee meetings with a focus on monitoring joiners, growth, new activists, leavers and other organising outcomes.

⑨ We are increasingly focused on increasing our visibility, raising our profile, and celebrating our successes so that members can see the impact of UNISON activity and the benefits of membership: This is crucial to recruitment and retention. During 2025, we have continued to be the most high-profile trade union and civil society organisation (in both the media and at workplace level) responding to the issues important to workers and their families. We have promoted best practice branch communication guides that support an organising approach and methodology; and continue to share best practice organising approaches with other UNISON regions, particularly through our OtW and BSOF priority projects.

There has been a significant increase in the number of branches and activists undertaking media work themselves as well as celebrating their successes on social media and through member participation events. Details of the UNISON NI 'Celebrating our success' event in November 2024 are highlighted opposite.

⑩ Our RMS team continues to play a vital role in our recruitment and organising plan and in the union-wide member engagement platform.

Our team maintains centralised processing and databases in partnership with all branches, mapping for joint branch assessments, and undertaking major data cleansing exercises in preparation for pay ballots. The team also plays a central role in our regional member retention strategy through activities that include:

- progressing new DOCAS Join Online agreements with recognised DOCAS employers;
- contacting new joiners within 2 weeks of joining to provide relevant member information; and
- distributing lists of lapsed members to branches for follow up.

The team also has a central role in our initiative to transfer existing direct debit payers in these employers to DOCAS.

CELEBRATING OUR SUCCESS

A snapshot of some of the extraordinary work of UNISON NI branches in organising, bargaining, campaigning and involving our members over the past five years.

In November 2024 we launched a regional report and video, and held an event at Belfast Castle, highlighting the key organising initiatives branches were most proud of over the previous 5 years.

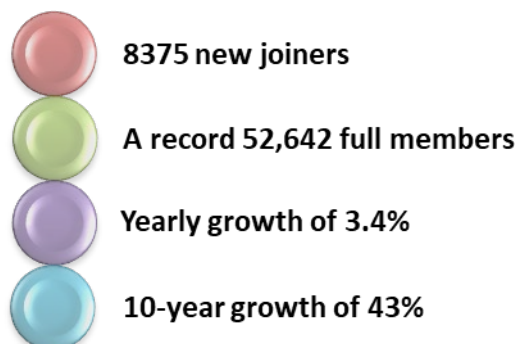
The achievements identified don't do justice to the exceptional commitment of our branch activists, members and staff team working together in partnership to meet the challenges of those years.

However, they do give a flavour of the wide variety of organising initiatives, bargaining strategies and campaigns that have contributed to our record recruitment and growth over the period.



Belfast City Hospital Resistance to implementation of live-tracking software for PCS staff	NE Education Growing the branch through Covid and beyond
Belfast Education Building a better branch	Newry & Mourne Health Save our services at Daisy Hill
Causeway LGBT+ activism and honouring Mark Ashton	NI Ambulance Negotiated end of shift protections previously taken as strike action
Community & Voluntary Sector Promoting equality & LGBT+ rights	NI Blood Transfusion Revitalising and growing the branch
Craigavon Hospitals Bringing diversity together	N&W Belfast Community Health Social care awards, Pay Max campaign and management of change
Derry Education Organising members with workplace issues	Northern Health Building our social media
Down Education Free School Meal for All campaign	Orchard Health & Social Care Moving members from agency employment to permanent Trust posts
Down & Lisburn Community Health Successful uplift in lower pay bands	RVH Belfast & Muckamore Abbey International Solidarity
Foyle Health / Omagh Fermanagh Health Uplift of Band 2 domiciliary care and reablement members to Band 3	S&E Belfast Health Building a successful future in the community
Greenpark Health Building a strong, representative branch	Sperrin Devenish Education Together we achieve more
Health Agencies Creating a truly regional branch	Ulster Community & Hospitals Trust Organising to Win in Camphill
Mater Hospital Membership participation initiative	Coleraine Magee / Jordanstown Universities The Real Living Wage

Table 1 shows that during 2024 UNISON NI consolidated our position as the biggest union in NI. By 31st December we had recorded:



2024 Recruitment: We recruited 8375 new joiners in 2024. This was 52% above our annual target of 5500 and was our 2nd highest ever total, following the record 10,700 new joiners recruited in 2023. Both figures were bolstered by unprecedented new joiners during industrial action. Our 2024 total significantly exceeded the 6,958 new members recruited in 2022 and the 4,609 recruited in 2021.

24 of our 27 branches met their branch recruitment target.

All 6 of our education branches again recruited significantly above target with a combined total of 2330 members - 28% of total NI recruitment over the period. This included:

- NE Education - 561 new joiners and 144% above target;
- Belfast Education - 509 new joiners and 121% above target;
- Down Education - 443 new joiners and 146% above target;
- Southern Education - 314 new joiners and 151% above target;
- Derry Education - 269 new joiners and 49% above target;
- Sperrin Devenish - 234 new joiners and 160% above target.

Similarly, Table 1 shows that 17 of our 18 health branches also exceeded their new branch recruitment targets by between 7% and 113%. These included, most significantly:

- NI Blood Transfusion – 17 new joiners and 113% above target;

- Health Agencies – 90 new joiners and 80% above target;
- UCHT - 660 new joiners and 74% above target;
- North & West Belfast – 414 new joiners and 73% above target.



The highest recruiting health branches were:

- Northern - 972 new joiners;
- UCHT – 660 new joiners;
- Down Lisburn – 485 new joiners;
- Foyle – 441 new joiners;
- Royal & Muckamore – 415 new joiners;
- N&W Belfast – 414 new joiners.

The C&V sector branch also maintained high levels of recruitment with 336 new joiners – 20% ahead of target.

Growth trends and full membership: With net growth of 3.4% (1750 more joiners than leavers), we ended 2024 with a record total full membership of 52,642 (see Fig. 3). Table 1 also shows that 19 of our 27 branches ended the year in growth, with minimal single digit member retraction in 6 others.

Fig. 1 shows that we recruited a very significant 2008 new joiners in January 2024, primarily due to industrial action. Our lowest recruitment took place in June, July, August and December.

Fig. 1: New joiners by month, 2024

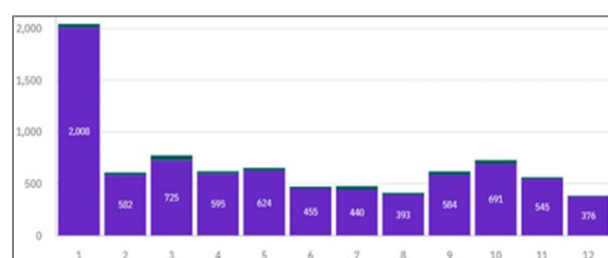


Fig. 2: New joiners & growth, 2014 - 2024

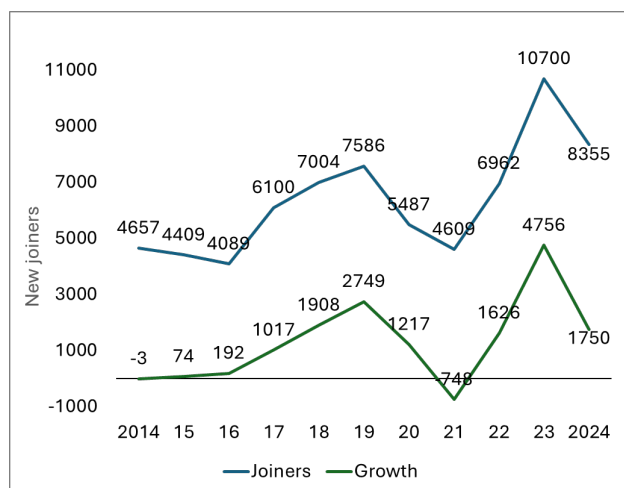


Fig. 3: Full membership, 2014 - 2024

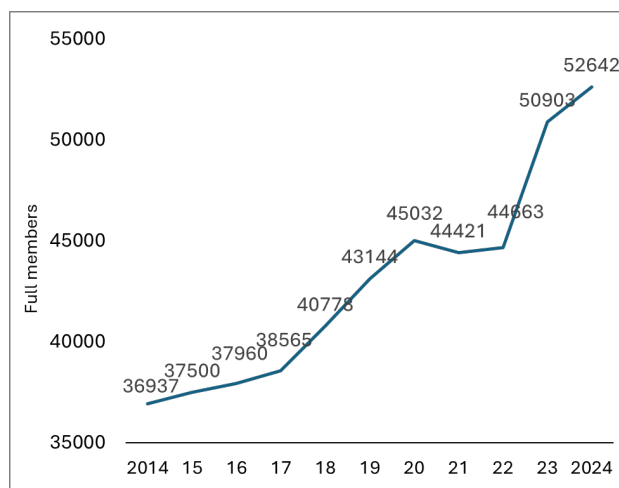


Table 1: New joiners and growth by branch, 2023 - 2024

Branch	New joiners - 2024					Growth Trends			2023 total joiners
	Target	Total	1 Jan - 15 Sep	(16 Sep - 31 Dec	% above or below target	1-year (No.)	5-year (%)	10-year (%)	
Belfast City Hospital	190	204	169	35	↑+7%	+20	+5%	+10%	259
Belfast Education	230	509	383	126	↑+121%	-10	+63%	+105%	1234
Causeway	180	199	163	36	↑+11%	+14	+3%	+5%	201
Comm & Voluntary	280	336	251	85	↑+20%	+12	+9%	+17%	331
Craigavon Health	200	301	244	57	↑+51%	+41	+20%	+44%	402
Derry Education	180	269	200	69	↑+49%	-4	+67%	+138%	756
Down Education	180	443	331	112	↑+146%	+222	+95%	+139%	832
Down Lisburn	355	485	408	77	↑+37%	+150	+18%	+31%	446
Foyle	380	441	344	97	↑+16%	+87	+8%	+15%	411
Greenpark	85	108	93	15	↑+27%	+13	+14%	+33%	158
Health Agencies	50	90	63	27	↑+80%	+39	+24%	+5%	60
Mater Hospital Trust	75	103	85	18	↑+37%	-5	-11%	-6%	109
N&W Belfast Health	240	414	326	88	↑+73%	+115	+21%	+44	389
NEELB	230	561	417	144	↑+144%	+196	+65%	+129%	909
Newry & Mourne	170	264	193	71	↑+55%	+67	+14%	+21%	256
NI Ambulance	85	55	48	7	↓-35%	-79	+2%	+3%	79
NI Blood Transfusion	8	17	14	3	↑+113%	+14	+61%	+77%	14
Northern Health	615	972	800	172	↑+58%	+246	+11%	+21%	916
Omagh & Fermanagh	225	251	184	67	↑+12%	+69	+5%	+5%	244
Orchard	220	335	268	67	↑+52%	-8	+7%	+23%	353
RVH & Muckamore	385	415	322	93	↑+8%	-9	+7%	+31%	517
South & East Belfast	280	370	283	87	↑+32%	+101	+15%	+20%	343
Southern Education	125	314	261	53	↑+151%	+139	+44%	+62%	384
Sperrin Devenish	90	234	203	31	↑+160%	+117	+58%	+154%	416
UCHT	380	660	529	131	↑+74%	+210	+31%	+80%	642
UU Coleraine Magee	12	6	5	1	↓-50%	-5	-24%	-31%	6
UU Jordanstown	30	19	13	6	↓-37%	-2	-49%	0%	33
Total	5480	8375	(6600)	(1775)	↑53%	+1750	+21%	+43%	10700

Table 1, Fig. 3 and Figs. 7-11 show that our full membership has grown by 21% in the past 5 years - up from 43,144 on 31 Dec 2019 to 52,642 on 31 Dec 2024.

- Our 6 education branches have grown most significantly over the 5-year period with full membership increases of 95% in Down Education, 67% in Derry Education, 65% in NE Education, 63% in Belfast Education; 58% in Sperrin Devenish, and 44% in Southern Education.
- 17 of our 18 health branches have also remained in sustained growth with full membership increases of 61% in NI Blood Transfusion; 31% in UCHT; 24% in Health Agencies; and 20% in Craigavon Health.
- Despite major funding problems and job loss, our community and voluntary sector membership has grown by 9% over the 5-year period.

In the past 10 years our full membership has grown by 42.5% - up from 36,937 on 31 Dec 2014 to 52,642 on 31 Dec 2024.

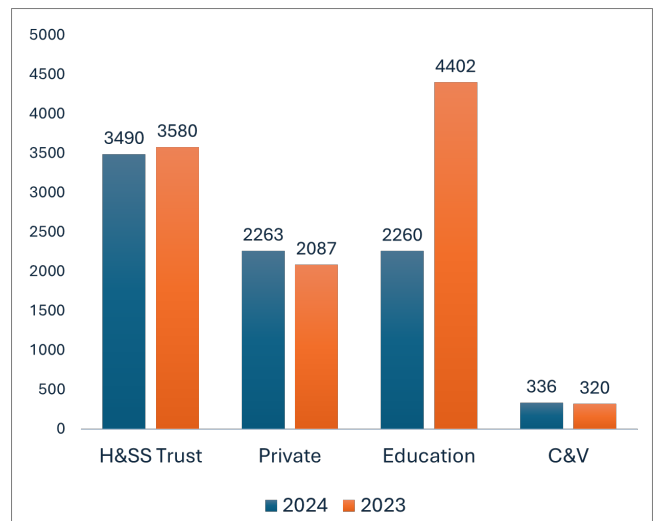
- Again, our 6 education branches have grown most over the 10-year period with 5 of these more than doubling their membership. Increases ranged from 62% in Southern Education to 154% in Sperrin Devenish.
- In health, 17 of our 18 branches have also grown over the 10-year period with full membership increase ranging from 3% in NIAS to 80% in UCHT.

New Joiners by sector, 2024: Fig 4 shows that in 2024 we recruited 2260 members from the education sector building on the record high of 4402 new education joiners in 2023. Our 6 education branches more than doubled their combined target of 1035 members.

Recruitment in our Trusts and C&V sector remained relatively steady, with a notable increase of 176 members in the private sector (primarily social care), compared to 2023.

New Joiners by occupational group, 2024: Fig. 5 shows that in 2024 there was a significant increase in the number of care assistants who joined us last year – up from 964 in 2023 to 1178 last year. This was a year-on-year increase from 9% of total recruits to 14% and was primarily linked to the success of our private social care initiative.

Fig. 4: New joiners by sector, 2023 - 2024



1649 classroom assistants joined us last year, building on the 3391 who joined us during 2023.



Cleaning and catering budgets have been hit by cuts, resulting in reductions across a range of areas. This has become a priority target for both organising and bargaining. There was a reduction in the number of cleaners and catering staff who joined us in 2024, compared to 2023.

The number of cleaners dropped from 709 (7% of total recruits) to 370 (4% of total recruits). Similarly, the number of catering workers dropped from 555 (5% of total recruits) to 374 (4% of total recruits). This is the subject of a special Regional Committee recruitment initiative and current outcomes are detailed later in this section.

The proportion of recruits from other groups remained relatively steady. In general, we saw a significant rise in the proportion of social services/social care members who joined us last year and a reduction in admin/P&T and support services, again reflecting the gap in the public service budget.

Fig. 5: New joiners by occupational group, 2023 - 2024

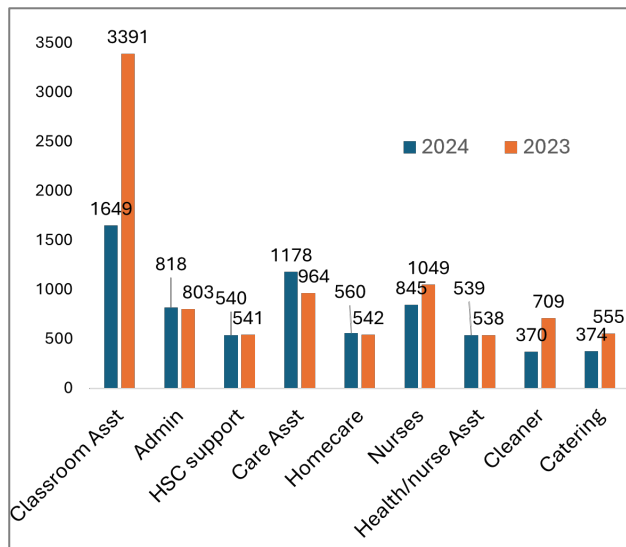
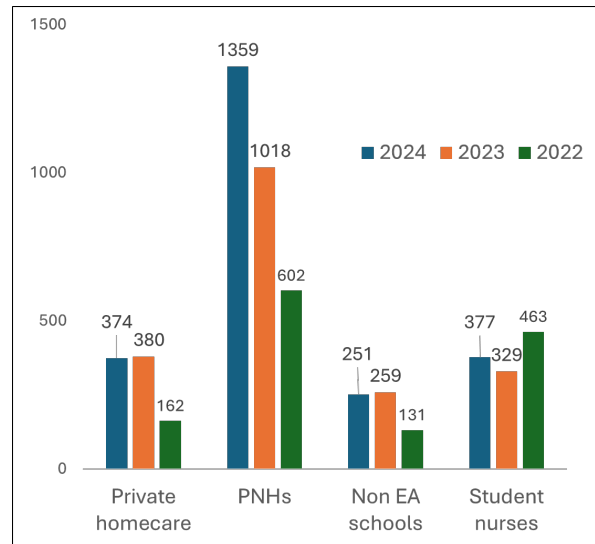


Fig. 6: New joiners by recruitment project, 2022 - 2024



Our special recruitment initiatives, 2024: Fig. 6 shows that our special recruitment initiatives were very successful last year, particularly those linked to our BSOF/OtW projects. 1733 members were recruited in private social care - a 30% increase on 2023 (1398) and more than double the 764 who joined us in 2022.

Our success in this sector has had a significant impact on our black & migrant worker membership. Care assistants were added as a category for international recruitment in late 2022 and recruitment took off in 2023. However, due to changes in the dependent visa programme, we are likely to see a decrease in international recruitment of care assistants. UNISON is campaigning on the increased health and care worker visa salary thresholds which make it difficult for many to meet the requirement for visa renewals and remain.

We recruited 251 members in non-EA schools. This built on the 259 new joiners we recruited in 2023 and was a 92% increase on the pre-project total of 131 members from 2022.

We also maintained high student nurse recruitment with 377 new joiners recruited at events in Queens University and Magee College. We also recruited 18 paramedic students at an event in December 2023.

The proportion of women new joiners declined from 77% in 2023 to 71% in 2024 reflecting the impact of cuts on women working in many traditional areas. Reversing this trend is a Regional Committee priority. Positively, 33% of our new joiners were young members aged 30 and under.

The retention challenge: As our membership continues to grow, it is essential that we retain as many as possible. This is particularly important due to ongoing job loss in the public sector.

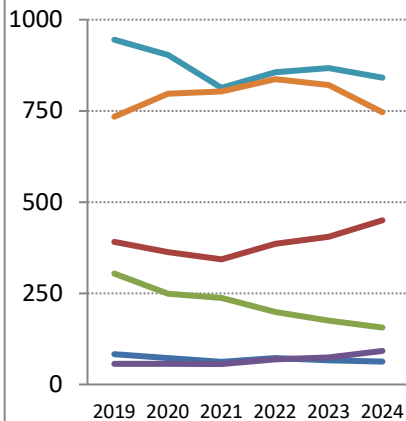
We relaunched the UNISON NI retention strategy to make sure our member retention processes are as effective as possible. This was a key Regional Committee priority for 2025, and our updated Strategy is detailed later in this section.

Success in this area is intimately linked to our bargaining and policy campaigns to increase funding for public services and our work on safe staffing.



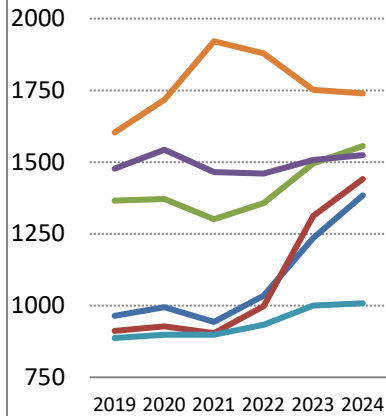
Branch growth trends, 2019 - 2024

Fig. 7: 0-1000 members



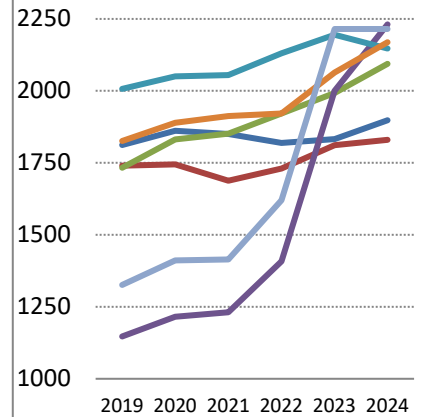
UU Coleraine
Health Agencies
UU Jordanstown
N I Blood Transfusion
Mater
NI Ambulance

Fig. 8: 1001-1750 members



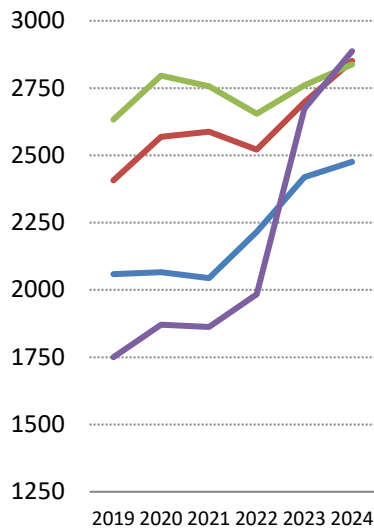
Southern Education
Sperrin & Devenish
Newry & Mourne
Causeway
Greenpark
Comm & Voluntary

Fig. 9: 1751-2250 members



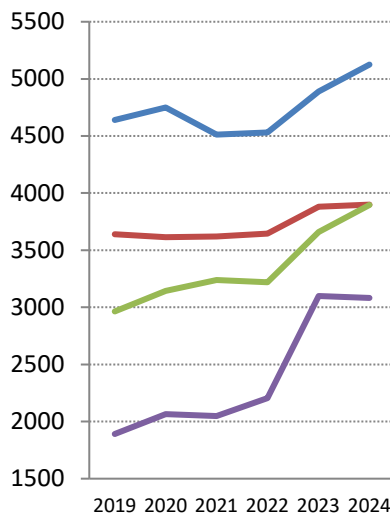
Omagh & Fermanagh
Belfast City Hospital
North & West Belfast
Down Education
Orchard H&SC
South & East
Derry Education

Fig.10: 2251 - 3000 members



Craigavon Health
Down Lisburn
Foyle
NEELB

Fig. 11: 3001+ members



Northern Health
RVH & Muckamore
UCHT
Belfast Education

The charts on this page show growth trends across branches from 31 December 2019 to 31 December 2024.

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



Our recruitment success has continued into 2025, and to date we have recorded:



Above target recruitment of 4854 new joiners to date



Significant growth of 1221 members



Record full membership of 53,732

Full membership: Our total full membership to 20th Sept 2025 is 53,732. This is marginally higher than this time last year (53,534) but 11.2% higher than the same period in 2023 (48,305). As a result, we continue to consolidate our position as NI's largest union.

Recruitment: Table 2 details the following branch achievements between 1st January and 20th September 2025. Note that branches have their own individual recruitment targets, and the total regional target is 5500 new joiners per year.

- Our current recruitment of 4854 new members is 23% above our expected target to this time of the year (3948).
- 6 branches have already met their end year target – Belfast Education, Down Education, NIBTS, Northern Health, Sperrin Devenish and UCHT. A further 11 branches are on track at 70% of target or above.
- With 141 new joiners to date, Sperrin Devenish branch is currently exceeding its end of year target by 57% - the highest rate across all branches.
- The 4 branches that have recruited the highest number of new members to date this year are Northern Health (663); UCHT (391); RVH & Muckamore (332) and Belfast Education (292).

An Autumn/Winter campaign, linked to current bargaining and campaigning issues, has commenced to maximise recruitment and organising outcomes across all branches.

Growth: We have a net gain of 1221 more joiners than leavers, with 22 branches in growth during 2025 to date. This equates to a current growth rate of 2.3%.

Online joiners: The proportion of members who join us online continues to increase year on year. Prior to the pandemic it was less than 50%, but this proportion had increased to 74% in 2023 and 79% last year.

To date this year 73% of new members have joined us online. Monitoring the number of members who do so is important as these members are more likely to join by Direct Debit, even in our large health and education branches where DOCAS is available for the majority of workers. The DOCAS deduction is more beneficial for tax purposes and ensures that members are fully protected for the range of services, including legal.

Our RMS team also continue to negotiate with new employers to offer online joiners the option of paying by DOCAS rather than Direct Debit.



Table 2 shows that the highest proportion of online joiners continue to come primarily from:

- branches with a membership spread over a wide geographic area, such as the C&V sector (92% online joiners) and NI Ambulance (91%);
- our education branches, such as Down Education (83%), Southern Education (81%), and Sperrin Devenish (72%); and
- branches with a wide range of community services, such as Orchard (91%), South and East Belfast (89%) and North & West Belfast (85%).

Our single site health branches, such as BCH (55%) and Craigavon Health (59%), have the lowest proportions of online joiners.

Table 2: New joiners and growth by branch, 1 Jan - 20 Sept 2025

Branch	New joiners - 2025			Progress against target		Growth
	Target	Total	% online joiners	No. to reach year-end target	% of target met to date	
Belfast City Hospital	190	124	55%	66	65%	↑+87
Belfast Education*	230	292	60%	Target met	127%	↓-46
Causeway*	180	124	69%	56	69%	↑+82
Community & Voluntary*	280	226	92%	54	81%	↑+8
Craigavon Health*	200	191	59%	9	96%	↑+148
Derry Education*	180	150	65%	3	83%	↓-37
Down Education*	180	267	83%	Target met	148%	↑+148
Down Lisburn*	355	192	79%	163	54%	↑+224
Foyle*	380	215	76%	165	57%	↑+147
Greenpark	85	63	62%	22	74%	↑+54
Health Agencies*	50	25	84%	25	50%	↑+35
Mater Hospital Trust	75	46	72%	29	61%	↑+43
N&W Belfast Health*	240	234	85%	6	98%	↑+151
NEELB*	230	224	67%	6	97%	↑+136
Newry & Mourne*	170	154	73%	16	91%	↑+93
NI Ambulance*	85	56	91%	29	66%	↓-14
NI Blood Transfusion*	8	8	63%	Target met	100%	↑+12
Northern Health	615	663	63%	Target met	108%	↑+425
Omagh & Fermanagh*	225	156	76%	69	69%	↑+94
Orchard*	220	214	91%	6	97%	↑+76
RVH & Muckamore*	385	332	55%	53	86%	↑+164
South & East Belfast	280	251	89%	29	90%	↑+132
Southern Education*	125	88	81%	37	70%	↑+114
Sperrin Devenish*	90	141	72%	Target met	157%	↑+106
UCHT*	380	391	81%	Target met	103%	↑+298
Ulster University*	42	27	67%	15	64%	↓-1
Total	5500	4854	73%	626	89%	1221

*Branch participating in BSOF Activity Fund

100%+ target met to date	70%-99% target met to date	50%-69% target met to date
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■ Recruitment achievements across key sectors, employers and groups

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

Key trends: Table 3 shows that during 2025, compared to 2024:

- there has been a higher proportion of new joiners from our Health Trusts and private social care sector; and
- there has been significant growth in the proportion of new joiners who are women.

In 2025 to date, we have recruited 2178 new members in the **health & social services sector** (excluding the private sector).

As a proportion of total recruitment, 45% of our new joiners in 2025 are from this sector, higher than the 43% recorded this time last year. Recruitment primarily comes from the 5 large Health & Social Care Trusts, with the highest number of new joiners (603) coming from Belfast.



In 2025 to date, we have recruited 1013 new members in the **education sector**.

As a proportion of total recruitment, 21% of our new joiners in 2024 are from the education sector, lower than the 27% recorded this time last year. Recruitment primarily comes from the controlled sector, with 852 new members (84%) employed by the Education Authority.

In 2025 to date, we have recruited 226 new members in the **community & voluntary sector**. As a proportion of total recruitment, 5% of our new joiners in 2024 are from this sector, higher than the 4% recorded last year.

19 new members were recruited from the Simon Community – the highest number of new joiners from a C&V sector employer this year. As in other sectors, we continue to deal with the impact of service changes and ongoing funding cuts.

Our membership in the **private sector** includes private homecare, contractors and private nursing/residential care homes. In total we have recruited 1408 new members to date – 29% of total recruitment.

Table 5 shows that 1053 new joiners have come from private social care, primarily as a result of our BSOF project. The majority of new joiners have come from BSOF target employers including:

- Healthcare Ireland Group - 97 new members;
- Beaumont Care Homes Ltd - 114 new members; and
- Ann's Home Care - 93 new members.

The other significant organising and bargaining successes from the project are reported later in this section.

1609 **young people** aged 30 or under have joined us in the year to date. This is 33% of total recruitment, the same proportion recorded last year. Our challenge remains to grow the next generation of union leaders.

During 2025, 79% of all new joiners are **women** (3835 members), significantly higher than the 74% recorded to date last year and the 71% recorded to the end of 2024.



Table 3: New joiners by sector, main employer and membership group, 2023 - 2025

Sector, main employer & membership group	New joiners			
	Jan-Sept 2025	Jan-Sept 2024	Total 2024	Total 2023
Health and social services (exc. private sector)	2178 (45%)	2852 (43%)	3490 (42%)	3580 (34%)
• Belfast HSC Trust	603	727	908	1105
• Northern HSC Trust	420	477	555	585
• South Eastern HSC Trust	310	454	540	544
• Southern HSC Trust	343	443	556	698
• Western HSC Trust	183	287	347	409
• BSO	19	35	57	38
• NIAS	35	24	28	66
Higher education	29 (<1%)	19 (<1%)	26 (<1%)	41 (<1%)
Education & other NJC	1013 (21%)	1752 (27%)	2260 (27%)	4402 (41%)
• Education Authority – Western	232	377	464	1109
• Education Authority – North Eastern	163	361	471	803
• Education Authority – Belfast	236	300	391	1106
• Education Authority – South Eastern	156	283	373	733
• Education Authority – Southern	65	237	273	359
Community & Voluntary	226 (5%)	251 (4%)	336 (4%)	320 (3%)
• Simon Community	19	10	10	3
• Apex Housing Association	14	26	31	20
• Positive Futures	14	8	13	18
• The Cedar Foundation	12	16	22	22
• Inspire Wellbeing	7	12	19	14
Private sector (inc. homecare, contractors,	1408 (29%)	1728 (26%)	2263 (27%)	2087 (20%)
• Beaumont Care Homes Ltd	114	154	188	187
• Healthcare Ireland Group	97	168	220	130
• Ann's Home Care	93	109	139	23
• Connected Health Domiciliary Care	63	53	57	113
• Conway Group	52	99	130	41
• Kathryn Homes NI Ltd	28	62	79	61
(Young members – 26 and under/now 30)	1609 (33%)	2171 (33%)	2791 (33%)	3396 (32%)
(Women)	3835 (79%)	4884 (74%)	5903 (71%)	8277 (77%)
Total	4854	6600	8375	10700

■ Recruitment achievements across key occupational groups and job roles

Key trends: Table 4 shows the following key trends during 2025.

- Following on from the record number of new joiners recruited during 2023 and 2024, we continue to recruit a high number across the majority of occupations and job roles.
- The highest proportion of our new joiners (35%) work in administrative / professional & technical roles, followed by social services/ social care staff (29%); nursing – all sectors (21%) and support services – all sectors (15%).
- The highest proportion of our new joiners work as care assistants (16% - 794 new joiners); followed by classroom and nursery assistants (15% - 726 new joiners); admin & clerical staff (10% - 503 new joiners); and nurses (10% - 490 new joiners).
- The proportion of care assistants recruited increased to 16% - up from 14% in the same period last year. This was the highest proportional increase of any group.
- The proportion of classroom & nursery assistants recruited was 15%.
- The proportion of new joiners recruited from support services roles (15%) is up from 12% last year. This reflects the renewed Regional Committee focus on recruiting and

organising cleaners/domestics and catering workers. See page 26 for details of the related organising project in this area.

1705 new members (35% of all new joiners) work in **administrative / professional & technical** roles. This includes 726 **classroom and nursery assistants** (15% of total recruitment). There are systemic issues affecting classroom assistants and we are meeting with our members to develop a strategic public campaign to try and resolve these.

1413 new members (29% of all new joiners) work in **social service/social care** roles. This includes 794 **care assistants** -16% of all new joiners and the highest single group recruited during the year to date. It also includes 290 **homecare workers** (6% of all new joiners) and 240 **support workers** (5% of all new joiners); and

1028 new members work in **nursing** roles across all sectors (21% of all new joiners). This includes 490 **nurses** (10% of all new joiners) and 282 **health/nursing assistants** (6% of all new joiners).



708 new members (15% of all new joiners) work in **support services** across all sectors. This includes 300 **cleaners/domestics** (6% of all new joiners), and 257 **catering workers** - 5% of all new joiners. The proportion of new joiners recruited from support services roles (15%) is up from 12% last year.

Table 4: New joiners by key occupational group and job roles, 2023 - 2025

Key occupational group and job roles	Recruitment			
	Jan-Sept 2025	Jan-Sept 2024	Total 2024	Total 2023
Admin/P&T – all sectors	1705 (35%)	2501 (38%)	3240 (39%)	5026 (47%)
• Classroom & nursery assistants	726 (15%)	1247 (19%)	1649 (20%)	3391 (32%)
• Admin & clerical	503 (10%)	671 (10%)	818 (10%)	803 (8%)
Social services/social care – all sectors	1413 (29%)	1828 (28%)	2368 (28%)	2180 (20%)
• Care assistants	794 (16%)	932 (14%)	1178 (14%)	964 (9%)
• Homecare workers	290 (6%)	409 (6%)	540 (6%)	541 (5%)
• Support workers	240 (5%)	414 (6%)	560 (7%)	542 (5%)
Nursing – all sectors	1028 (21%)	1467 (22%)	1786 (21%)	1965 (18%)
• Nurses	490 (10%)	709 (11%)	845 (10%)	1049 (10%)
• Health/Nursing assistants	282 (6%)	401 (6%)	539 (6%)	538 (5%)
Support services – all sectors	708 (15%)	804 (12%)	981 (12%)	1529 (14%)
• Cleaners/Domestics	300 (6%)	312 (5%)	370 (4%)	709 (7%)
• Catering workers	257 (5%)	299 (5%)	374 (4%)	555 (5%)
Total	4854	6600	8375	10700



The UNISON NI Strategic Organising Unit (SOU) currently has 4 staff members – 3 permanent BSOF Local Organisers and a Regional Organiser seconded from the union-wide SOU. The overall goal of the Unit is to lead on new Organising to Win (OtW) initiatives and apply best practice organising techniques to grow and strengthen the union in ways that deliver protection, support and wins for members.

It is responsible for developing and implementing the strategic organising projects and campaigns prioritised by the regional BSOF Steering Group. It also collaborates with

UNISON College NI to build organising capacity and to provide support for wider staff and branch organising efforts.



■ ‘One UNISON’ private social care project

UNISON NI continues to play a lead role in the Organising to Win ‘One UNISON’ private social care project. This project initially ran as a pilot project in NI, Scotland and Wales and its success led to a union-wide launch in January 2025. Ringfenced BSOF resources have been allocated to this project.

The challenges of organising in the private social care sector are significant and include high staff turnover; a dispersed and fragmented membership that includes an increasing number of black and migrant workers; and hundreds of often hostile employers. However, with an estimated 20,000+ staff working across the sector, the potential for further recruitment is huge and we are committed to organising this too often exploited workforce.

Ten employers have been targeted by the project including Beaumont Care; Health Care Ireland; Ann’s Home Care; Electus Care; Kathryn’s Care Homes; Optimum Care; Connected Health; Quality Care; North West Care; and Strabane District Caring.

All 10 branches involved in the project regularly attend Social Care Steering Group meetings and are currently working with organisers to identify social care leads who will support new active members and stewards. All 10 branches have enabled publication of a “Know your rights” pocket

reference guide for social care workers which has received praise from members and activists alike.



Our objectives

- ✓ Recruit more members
- ✓ Elect more stewards
- ✓ Organise, engage & mobilise workers – including our B&MW members
- ✓ Secure new bargaining arrangements & recognition within private social care
- ✓ Halt further privatisation from the NHS to the private sector
- ✓ Ultimately, return privatised services back in house

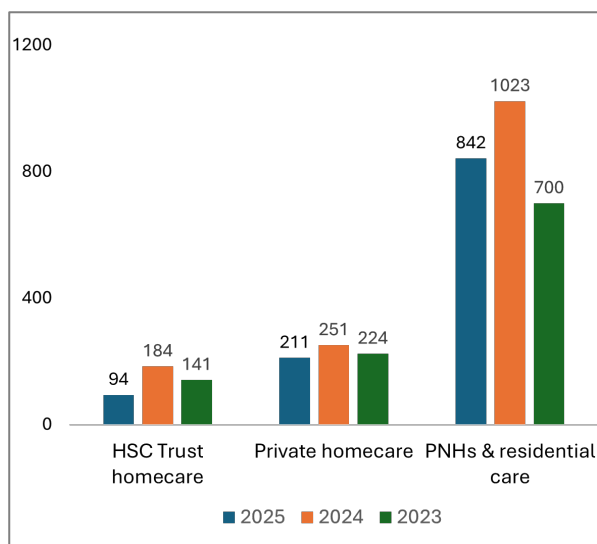
Let's make care work.

Recruitment outcomes: Fig. 12 and Table 5 (page 24) shows the following key outcomes.

- 1053 new joiners have been recruited to date in 2025 across all private social care employers. We now have a total of 5774 members in the sector – a 6% increase on this time last year (5458).

- The private social care sector as a whole represents 11% of our total membership.
- 842 members have been recruited in private nursing homes and residential settings in the year to date. We now have a total of 4385 members in the sector working in 188 companies. This sector represents 8% of our total membership

Fig. 12: Joiners from HSC Trusts and private social care, 2023 – 2025 (1 Jan – 20 Sept of each year)



- 211 private sector homecare workers have been recruited to date this year. We now have a total of 1389 members in the sector across 50 companies. This sector represents 3% of our total membership.
- Table 5 shows that our largest group of homecare members (1873) still work for our HSC Trusts. This is 134 fewer than this time last year (2007) and reflects the continuing and disturbing trend to outsource. We continue to investigate this decline and any potential reductions in in-house provision. Fig. 12 shows that 94 public sector homecare workers have been recruited this year to date. In-sourcing is a significant UNISON-wide priority campaign and we continue to challenge the procurement process in NI.

Organising outcomes: Intensive member engagement continues to take place within targeted companies and to date:

- 21 new stewards have been elected, with 15 either fully trained or undertaking training through UNISON College;
- 7 organising committees have been established in target companies to

provide mutual support and to develop organising and bargaining strategies;

- a Social Care Network, made up of stewards and active members, meets regularly to help shape our direction of travel in social care
- 55 members have made the 'Active member pledge' and have attended 1-1 meetings.

The 'Active Member' category pilot was launched in February 2025 and its success will be evaluated prior to potential roll-out across all branches. Local Organisers are directing active members towards workplace organising and wider campaign activity, with regular 1-1 follow up to build skills and confidence towards further activism.



Recruiting and organising both EU nationals and other migrant workers in social care remains a UNISON priority. The private nursing home sector, in particular, has a higher proportion of migrant workers than the general workforce and they face major employment issues associated with their employment status, immigration policies, racism, racist attacks and discrimination.

The work of the project has led to a 100% increase in attendance and participation at the regional B&MW Group. 3 new women Black and Migrant worker branch officers have also been elected. They were previously private social care members within the project.

Bargaining outcomes: Significant bargaining activity continues to take place across target companies. For example, members in Kathryn's homes received an uplift in their hourly rate for working a Sunday and members in North West Care were successful in their grievance to be offered the same rate of pay and mileage as colleagues working in

other areas. Work also continues to support members to submit collective grievances around bullying, hours of work, safe staffing and using mobile phones. Further examples of bargaining wins within specific private social care companies during 2025 are detailed in Section 2 of this report.

Campaign and policy outcomes: The NI SOU team are progressing two key national Fair Visa and Fair Work campaigns, as well as a NI health & safety campaign for social care workers.

The Fair Visa campaign aims to get the UK Government to decouple the health & social care visa from individual employer sponsorship (which has been identified as the root cause of extreme levels of abuse and exploitation of many migrant key workers delivering social care).

In NI our active members are lobbying our MPs to secure commitment to migrant key worker charters. Emails have been sent to MPs inviting them to meet with members to discuss the changes proposed in the Immigration White Paper. Members meetings took place in September to work on testimonies and record them as part of the ongoing campaign.

The campaign is building towards a lobby day in the UK Parliament on 17th December (International Migrants Day).



■ 'One UNISON' non-Education Authority schools project

This project is targeted at the non-EA workforce, primarily in Integrated, Voluntary Grammar and Irish-Medium schools. Its focus is on recruiting new members and activists; and delivering recognition, facilities and collective bargaining agreements to improve pay, terms and conditions.



UNISON's engagement with the Fair Work Forum is for collective bargaining for legally enforceable minimum standards for pay and conditions in social care. A commitment has been given to pay the Real Living Wage and a report was presented to the Minister.

More detailed policy developments on the progress of the Fair Work Forum and social care are presented in Section 3 of this report but it is clear that increased recruitment, member engagement and bargaining activity has had a positive impact on UNISON's power and influence within the sector.

A new health and safety campaign will be launched by the NI SOU team and branch steering group in November. Its key objectives are to organise and unionise workers in private social care using health & safety and the promotion of good mental health as organising tools.

Health and safety reps will be identified and condensed training will be organised, tailored around their work patterns and encouraging employer responsibility. A Facebook page has been set up, and a TikTok account is currently being created.

Recruitment outcome: Table 5 shows that 146 members have been recruited in non-EA schools to date during 2025 adding to the 161 recruited in in the same period last year. We now have 1144 full members in the sector - a 13% increase compared to 2024 (1014).

We also have members in 78 non-EA schools – a number of which have been targeted for intensive organising activity across our education branches. They include:

- Down Education - Cedar Integrated Primary School and Bangor Grammar;
- Derry Education - Foyle College & Lumen Christi College;
- Belfast Education - Cranmore Integrated Primary School, Rathmore Grammar & Hazelwood Integrated College;
- North-Eastern Education - Coleraine Grammar & Ulidia College;
- Southern Education - Windmill Integrated Primary School & Portadown Integrated Primary School; and
- Sperrin & Devenish - Drumragh Integrated College & Erne Integrated College.



Organising and recognition: Targeted organising activity has resulted in significant recruitment; member engagement; the identification and training of new stewards; and the negotiation of an additional 5 recognition agreements. 7 new stewards have also been elected.

Since last Regional Council, recognition agreements have been signed with 5 schools - Cedar IPS and Lecale Trinity Grammar (Down Education); Portadown IPS and

Windmill IPS (Southern Education); and Erne Integrated College (Sperrin & Devenish). Workplace reps have also been elected and Joint Negotiating Forums (JNFs) established.

Recognition negotiations are ongoing with Bangor Grammar (Down Education); Maine IPS (NEELB), Omagh IPS and Drumragh College (Sperrin & Devenish).

Ongoing organising work continues in other schools, with reps identified and elected in several workplaces.

Bargaining wins and progress: Significant progress has been made in growing UNISON's presence in non-EA schools, securing formal recognition, and achieving tangible bargaining wins that improve members' pay, conditions, and workplace protections. Significant wins in Cedar IPS, Coleraine Grammar and Portadown IPS are detailed in Section 2 and include improved contracts, pay improvement, and new equality policies.

Future activity is focused on:

- securing recognition in a further 3 target schools;
- continuing bargaining work to align all staff with EA/NJC terms and conditions;
- implementing new workplace policies to improve member welfare and safety.



Table 5: UNISON NI Strategic Organising Unit special recruitment initiatives – New joiners, full membership & total employers, 2024 - 2025

Special recruitment initiatives	New joiners				Full members		No. of employers	
	Jan-Sep 2025	Jan-Sep 2024	Total 2024	Total 2023	To Sept 2025	To Sept 2024	To Sept 2025	To Sept 2024
Private homecare	211	251	374	380	1389	1335	50	48
PNHs & residential care	842	1023	1359	1018	4385	4123	188	189
HSC Trust Homecare	94	184	214	201	1873	2007	5	5
Non-EA Schools	146	161	251	259	1144	1014	78	75

■ BSOF Activity Fund recruitment and member engagement projects

Over the past 2 years our branches have contributed over £400,000 to employ temporary BSOF Activity Fund Local Organisers (AFLOs) to work on multi-branch recruitment, member engagement and member learning projects. These projects are co-funded by UNISON College NI and the BSOF Activity Fund, and supplement our existing permanent BSOF regional resources.

The 2024/25 project was part-funded by 19 health and education branches, employed 6 temporary LOs and ended in February 2025. The 2025/26 project has been part-funded by 21 health, education, University and C&V sector branches, employs 7 LOs and is scheduled to run until April 2026.

Both projects have succeeded due to the centrality of Organising to Win best practice process, methods and approaches; central management and good governance; effective communication and partnership working between the staff and activist teams; and the effective monitoring and evaluation of targets and outcomes.

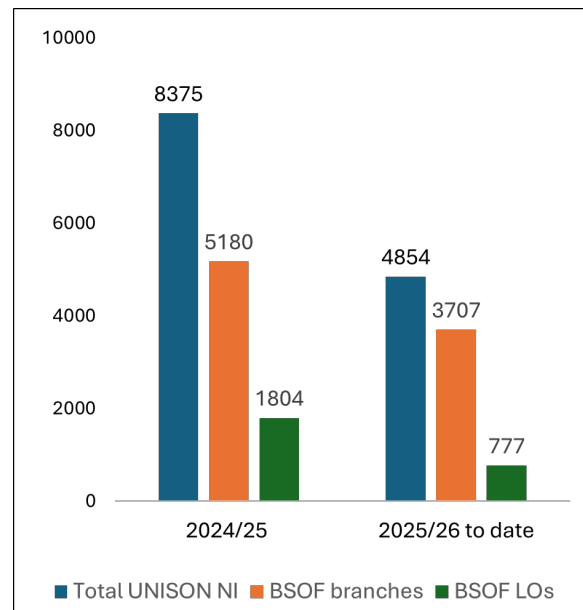


Recruitment outcomes from 2024/25 project:

Fig. 13 shows the following outcomes between Feb 2024 and Feb 2025.

- AFLOs recruited 1804 new members across the 19 participating branches. This was 29% above our 1400 new joiner target.
- Recruitment by AFLOs comprised 35% of the total number of new members recruited by the 19 participating branches (5180) and 22% of total UNISON NI recruitment over the period (8375).

Fig. 13: BSOF Activity Fund projects - new joiners, 2024/25 and 2025/26 to date



Recruitment outcomes from 2025/26 project

Fig. 13 shows the following outcomes between 1 April 2025 and 18 Sept 2025.

- AFLOs have recruited 777 new members across the 21 participating branches. We are on track to meet our 1650 target.
- Recruitment by AFLOs comprises 20% of the total number of new members recruited by the 21 participating branches (3707) and 15% of total UNISON NI recruitment over the period (4854).

Organising, member participation and bargaining outcomes:

Fig. 14 details some of the additional organising, member engagement and bargaining outcomes that arise from AFLO activity and branch participation in the projects. As a result Regional Committee and the BSOF Committee urges all branches to consider participating in similar initiatives for 2026/27.

Additional AFLO activities and outcomes are as follows.

- AFLOs assist branches to build the steward base, particularly in areas where there is currently little or no activist cover.

This includes both identifying new leaders themselves and enabling Area Organisers and branch activists to devote additional time to this core union building priority.

- AFLOs have visited thousands of workplaces, held hundreds of meetings, and engaged with 10,000+ members on issues spanning the entire UNISON agenda. This member engagement activity is core to encouraging greater member participation in the life of the union and continues to be a key organising and member retention priority for branches.
- As a result of direct contact with members, hundreds of issues have been referred to branches and staff for action. This has improved the union's response to issues affecting the members, improved representation and has introduced new items for the bargaining agenda.

- Over 2000 members have signed up to the Skills Academy following numerous Lunch and Learn sessions organised within workplaces in health and education.

Fig. 14: BSOF Activity Fund – Additional member engagement outcomes



■ Organising to increase our membership in core catering and cleaning/domestic roles

Despite significant growth across all sectors and the majority of occupational groups, Fig. 15 shows that in 2024 our membership retracted in the core roles of catering (a net loss of 62 members) and cleaning/domestics (a net loss of 151 members). This retraction was evident across our education and health branches.

In 2024 cleaners/domestics made up 5.7%, and catering staff made up 7.2% of our total full membership. These proportions differ markedly across branches.

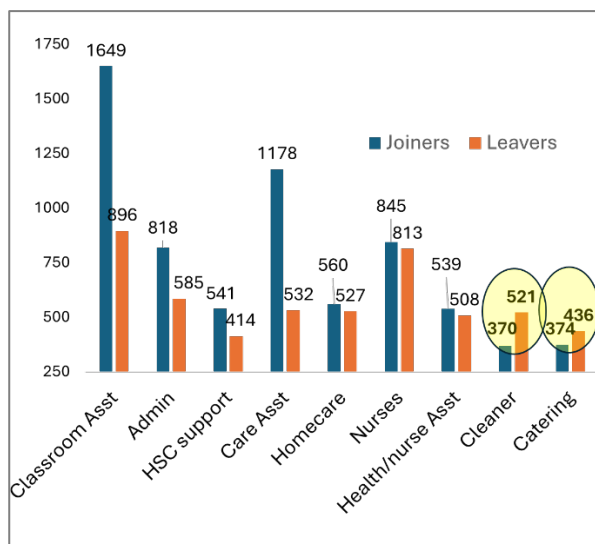


Objectives and targets: Reversing this retraction and increasing the number of cleaners/domestics and catering staff in our membership was agreed as a Regional Committee priority project.

Key objectives and targets included:

- identifying the key factors impacting on recruitment, retention and membership levels across these roles;
- developing the organising and bargaining interventions necessary to increase the number of cleaners/ domestics and catering workers within UNISONs membership across our HSC Trusts and Education Authority areas; and
- increasing the democratic participation of cleaners/domestics and catering members on UNISON structures and within the life of the union.

Fig. 15: New joiners & leavers by occupational group, 2024



Outcomes: The project was progressed by our staff and activist teams. In particular, targeting these groups was a priority activity in the workplans of the 7 temporary BSOF LOs within the 21 branches involved in the Activity Fund recruitment and member engagement project. The following outcomes have been identified.

- During 2025 to date, compared to 2024, there has been an increase in the number of cleaners/domestics and catering staff recruited as a proportion of our total membership. Table 4 (page 20) showed that the proportion of cleaners/domestics recruited has increased from 4.4% of total recruitment last year to 6.2% during 2025 to date. The proportion of catering staff recruited has increased from 4.5% to 5.7%.

■ Additional recruitment and organising initiatives

Student nurses: Table 6 shows that successful in-person student nurse recruitment events took place in Queens University and Magee College during 2025 with 241 new joiners to date. Interventions will be made to increase access to students at these events during 2026.

We also continued to engage with potential new student members through:

- hosting a series of online sessions about the benefits of joining UNISON;
- offering CPD courses on hundreds of different topics through the UNISON College NI, including free access to our

- 300 cleaners/domestics have been recruited, including 156 from our Health Trusts and 68 employed by the Education Authority.
- 257 catering staff have been recruited, including 106 from of Health Trusts and 90 employed by the Education Authority.

Analysis of the impact of the project on full membership levels by group, employer and branch will take place in January 2026. However, it is clear that our membership in both job roles has been impacted by factors such as recruitment delays in appointing temporary/agency staff to permanent contracts, an increase in agency workers, non-replacement of staff post-Covid and potential poaching by other unions.

Tackling these issues forms a key part of the bargaining agenda at branch and regional level. Recruiting new members, retaining existing members, and identifying new cleaning and catering activists will continue to form a core part of branch and regional plans.



student nurse members to nursing times with 30 clinical e-learning modules and 100s of journal articles; and

- sending out an email (via HQ and UCAS) to social work students.



Student nurse recruitment has been led by Area Organiser Orlaith McCarthy with support from branches and the staff team.

We continue to participate in a union-wide project to identify the most positive, attractive route to engage, recruit and retain student healthcare members.

Student paramedics: Successful student paramedic recruitment took place at Magee in December 2024 resulting in 20 new joiners. A further event will take place in December this year.



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

- We continue to identify new entry points, and opportunities for engagement and recruitment of newly employed staff and former members.
- We support UNISON-wide recruitment initiatives.
- We promote the 'Be on the safe side' health & safety initiative, maximising the information and support provided to members across all sectors.
- Self-organised group activity in the organising programme continues. They support membership growth and retention through online communications linked to equality campaigns; the organisation of events; and raising UNISON's profile in key bargaining, campaigning and policy areas.
- The UNISON College continues to be a highly effective tool for engaging with members and non-members through online activist training, member learning and other initiatives.



Table 6: New joiners and full membership - student nurses and student paramedics, 2023 - 2025

Recruitment initiatives	Recruitment				Full members	
	Jan-Sep 2025	Jan-Sep 2024	Total 2024	Total 2023	To Sept 2025	To Sept 2024
Student nurses	241	339	377	329	1022	963
Student paramedics	2	20	20	18	27	/

The UNISON NI retention strategy was relaunched in 2025 to maximise the effectiveness of our retention processes, reduce our leavers and increase the number of lapsed members who rejoin.



Our Strategy continues to identify specific actions that can be taken by branches (with the support of the staff team) to retain members at three stages of the member retention journey:

1. Join and welcome,
2. Member experience, and
3. Leave & lapse.

As part of the Organising to Win approach, our 2025 strategy has a renewed focus on branches engaging with new members and getting them to participate as a core retention activity. We have also prioritised the role of branches in contacting lapsed members and ensuring that this, and other retention activity, is monitored at branch committee meetings.

Our strategy continues to be supported by a number of projects aimed at increasing the number of members who pay their subs by DOCAS, rather than by Direct Debit (DD). DD payers are now the majority of joiners. Potential reasons for this include the increase in online joining, particularly during the pandemic; our very successful recruitment in private social care where DOCAS is not yet available; and our recruitment of student nurses whose membership transfers to DD through auto-enrolment when they enter employment.

UNISON NI RETENTION STRATEGY OUR KEY OBJECTIVES

DIRECT DEBIT AND DOCAS

Objective ① - Maximise the number of members paying their union subs by DOCAS, rather than Direct Debit

CONTACTING NEW MEMBERS

Objective ② - Maximise the use of new joiners' calls, emails and welcome events to increase the numbers of members who remain in membership beyond a 3-month period.

A WELL ORGANISED WORKPLACE

Objective ③ - Maintain a well organised workplace. This will help ensure that members experience the full benefits of being in UNISON.

COMMUNICATIONS

Objective ④ - Prioritise effective communication strategies to ensure that branches are sufficiently visible to all members in recognised and unrecognised workplaces, and to peripatetic and home workers.

DOCAS CLEANSE REPORTS

Objective ⑤ - Members who cease DOCAS payments appear on DOCAS cleanse reports. Contact should be made with these potential leavers prior to membership lapse to either confirm their intention to leave or to seek to persuade them to remain.

DIRECT DEBIT CESSATION REPORTS

Objective ⑥ - Members who cease Direct Debit payments appear on DD cessation/suspension reports. GDPR compliant contact should be made with these potential leavers prior to membership lapse to confirm their intention to leave or to persuade them to remain.

WARMS LEAVERS REPORTS

Objective ⑦ - All member listed on WARMS Leavers Reports should be contacted in a GDPR compliant method – even if they may have previously been contacted due to their listing on a DOCAS cleanse or DD cessation / suspension report.

As reported earlier in this section, our project with the HSC Trusts, Education Authority and other recognised DOCAS employers to enable online joiners to join by DOCAS has been successful in getting employers to sign up to the process, but technical issues need to be overcome to make this the preferred option for those accessing the online joining portal.

Similarly, our project encouraging DD payers to convert to DOCAS has been limited by the current absence of an online transfer option.

Retention is a UNISON-wide challenge, and our strategy builds on significant work being

undertaken by the union-wide Organising to Win campaign. We will be undertaking a more detailed analysis to better understand the reasons why members leave. This will include assessing the impact of post-pandemic job relocation and service reorganisation on potential growth within sectors and branches.

Led by our admin team, our online joiners phonebank has recommenced. It is an important member retention initiative and involves phone calls to thousands of new online joiners a year. It also helps to identify key organising and bargaining issues.

BRANCH PRIORITY RETENTION ACTIVITY CHECKLIST

- ☑ Champion the DOCAS joining option, if available, for all new joiners and those reinstating their membership.
- ☑ Meet all existing members paying by Direct Debit (in HSC Trusts and Education Authority workplaces) and get them to sign a new application form that will transfer them to DOCAS.
- ☑ Organise in-person or online welcome events for new joiners. Provide them with the opportunity for meaningful participation in branch activity at an early stage.
- ☑ Maintain a healthy branch and well-organised workplace. Maximise workplace presence and member participation; expand activism; communicate with all members.
- ☑ Scrutinise branch leavers reports, DOCAS cleanse reports and Direct Debit cessation reports and contact all lapsed members and soon to be lapsed members. Face-to-face contact is best.

The priority is to ensure that unintentional leavers are identified and retained and that intentional leavers are persuaded to rejoin.

- ☑ At Branch Committee meetings retention activity should be a standard agenda item for discussion. Branches should:
 - ✓ scrutinise the monthly leavers' report provided by your Area Organiser
 - ✓ identify leavers patterns that may require urgent branch or regional intervention e.g. evidence of 'poaching' or payroll errors
 - ✓ ensure all leavers are allocated to committee members for contact in a GDPR compliant way – ideally face-to-face but this can take place by telephone, or, if necessary, by email
 - ✓ ensure that the result of this contact is recorded on a central spreadsheet and reported back to the subsequent branch committee meeting to enable effective monitoring and evaluation of activity.

Summary of membership reports available to branches and key priority actions

<p>DOCAS CLEANSE REPORTS</p> <p>Sent to branches 2/3 times a year from NI RMS. Lists all members who have ceased DOCAS payments and are due to be lapsed. Cessation may be unintentional or intentional.</p>	<p>DIRECT DEBIT CESSATION REPORTS</p> <p>Centrally emailed to branches every week within the Leavers Report and also available on WARMS. Lists all members who have ceased/suspended DD payments and are due to be lapsed. More likely to be intentional.</p>	<p>LEAVERS REPORTS</p> <p>Emailed to branches every week from HQ, with more detailed info available on WARMS. Lists members who have likely appeared on previous DD and DOCAS reports, but have now reached the end of the 12-week period and have lapsed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Be satisfied that every leaver is intentional and not due to error ☑ Intervene to retain unintentional leavers ☑ Seek to persuade and retain intentional leavers
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BUILDING BRANCH AND WORKPLACE ORGANISATION

This section outlines the progress of NI branches in 4 key areas that are crucial to building strong branch and workplace organisation.



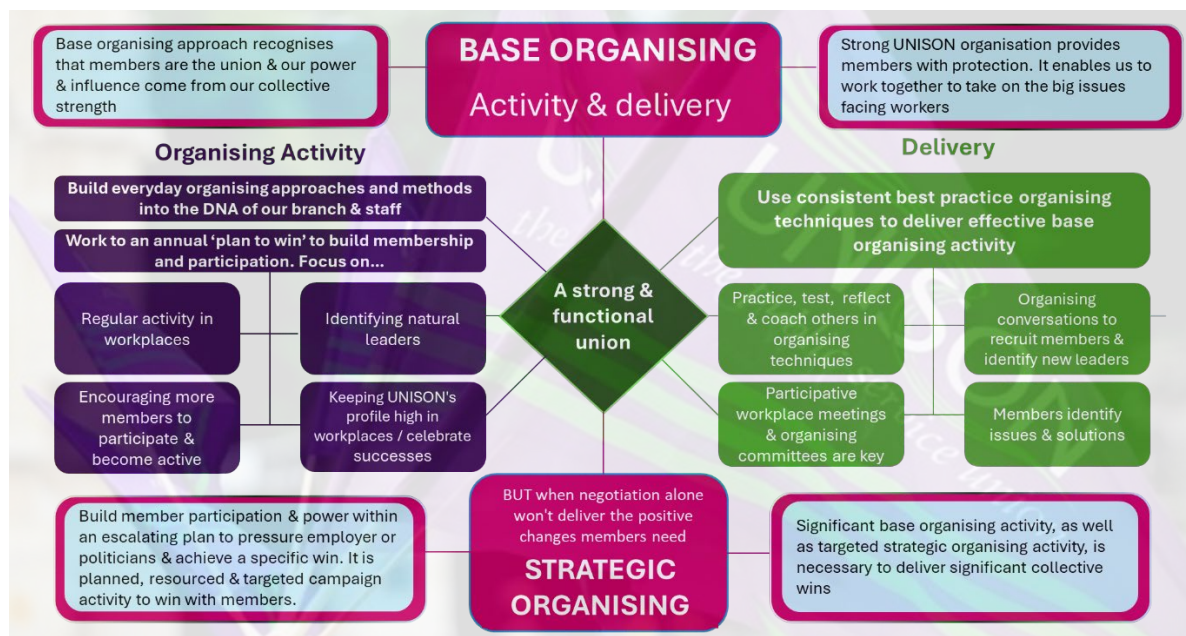
The 'base' organising approach championed by the Organising to Win initiative is all about ensuring that the day-to-day work of UNISON branches and regions is focused on developing and maintaining a strong and functional union at workplace and branch level. This approach recognises that our members are the union and that our power and influence come from our collective strength. Strong UNISON organisation provides members with protection and enables us to work together to take on the big issues facing us.

For the purposes of this report, Regional Committee measures and highlights some specific branch development indicators.

These are discussed on page 34 and include the availability of paid release; completion of a yearly joint branch assessment, online organising framework, related branch plan as well as up-to-date mapping; participation in online communications activity; membership growth and recruitment; the number of new stewards recruited and branch posts filled; and compliance with UNISON financial rules. More detailed indicators are used in the joint branch assessment process, tailored to each branch.

Continued high levels of recruitment during 2025 is reflective of significant member engagement, including hundreds of face-to-face meetings with members and potential members, and a whole range of recruitment activity across workplaces. However, it is clear that challenges remain that impact on the ability of branches to progress base organising activities. For example, vacant branch committee positions are the subject of special action for the remainder of the year.

With the support of UNISON College NI, some branches have already started to build everyday best practice organising approaches into their day-to-day activities and this Organising to Win and branch development training will be expanded to other branches over the coming months



Branch Development Group: The BDG continues to monitor all aspects of branch development and organisation and during 2025 noted positive progress across the key areas of recruitment, retention, activist cover, member participation, democratic structure and functioning, as well as branch alignment with Organising to Win best practice.

- 90% of UNISON NI branches met their recruitment targets by end 2024. 65% have met or are on track to meet their target to date this year. Regional Council is likely to push for 100% by the end of 2025.
- Our 2024/25 and 2025/26 BSOF Activity Fund initiatives continue to increase member engagement and the democratic participation of our members in the branches participating in this key organising project.
- Our organising and branch development strategy continues to be supported by UNISON College NI. In addition to increasing participation through innovative delivery, member engagement, and support in both member learning and activist education; it is also training and supporting many branches to build Organising to Win best practice methods and approaches into their day-to-day activities.
- All branches completed their annual Joint Branch Assessments (JBA) and online Organising Framework (OF) and are working to an annual plan. The BDG, UNISON College NI and organising team are currently working with branches to maximise the organising potential of the 2025 JBAs and subsequent branch plans for 2026.
- UNISON's profile has remained high across the majority of branches. This has ensured that members can see the benefit of UNISON activity and the benefits of membership.
- The majority of branches are fully engaging with our 'One UNISON' and BSOF organising projects, including progressing the active member category and

supporting the employer-based organising committees in their areas.

- Retention activity is increasingly being prioritised across branches including contacting lapsed members, switching members from Direct Debit to DOCAS, and contacting new members.



To maintain this success the BDG have recommended that branches implement the following actions to help maintain a strong and functional union at workplace and branch level.

- Branches should continue to implement the UNISON NI Member Retention Strategy and ensure that progress is monitored at branch committee meetings.
- Branches should respond to gaps in stewards cover by prioritising the identification of natural leaders across all workplaces and employers and encouraging more members to participate and become active. UNISON College NI can provide support across all these areas.
- The BDG again identified gaps in branch committees, and is working with the staff organising team to support branch committees to fill vacant posts, including maximising proportionality and fair representation and increasing the number of shared posts. Core posts on equality and international solidarity require special action from most branches.

- The BDG is constantly reviewing Branch Rules to consistency check against the Rulebook and the Code of Good Branch Practice. The Group, in particular, recommends branch action to develop new structures covering specific groups delivering public sector services outside the main Trusts and Education Authority; positive action structures for specific occupational groups; more local development and co-operation on self-organised groups; and job sharing or specific posts to mainstream equality.



Joint branch assessments, activity-based budgets and their implementation: In NI the RMS and organising teams continue to work in partnership with branches to ensure that our Joint Branch Assessments (supported by the union-wide online Organising Framework) is an effective decision-making forum for building branch and workplace organisation and that it is being translated into branch plans and reorganised branch committee agendas.

During 2025 the JBA process was reviewed to ensure that the process, and subsequent Branch Plan, was more closely aligned with Organising to Win methods and approaches.

This review also took into consideration the content of a new union-wide 'Branch development day' course. This was initially piloted in private social care to encourage branches to incorporate organising into their day-to-day activities and pave the way for further organising strategy and skills development. It is currently being rolled out to all branches in NI.



Organising Framework (OF): Following a major revamp, the union-wide online Organising Framework was relaunched for 2025. All NI branches submitted their OFs on time to HQ.

This Framework supports our more in-depth regional JBA process. Following a review, the NEC made a number of recommendations to improve OF completion rates and enable ongoing development and improvement.

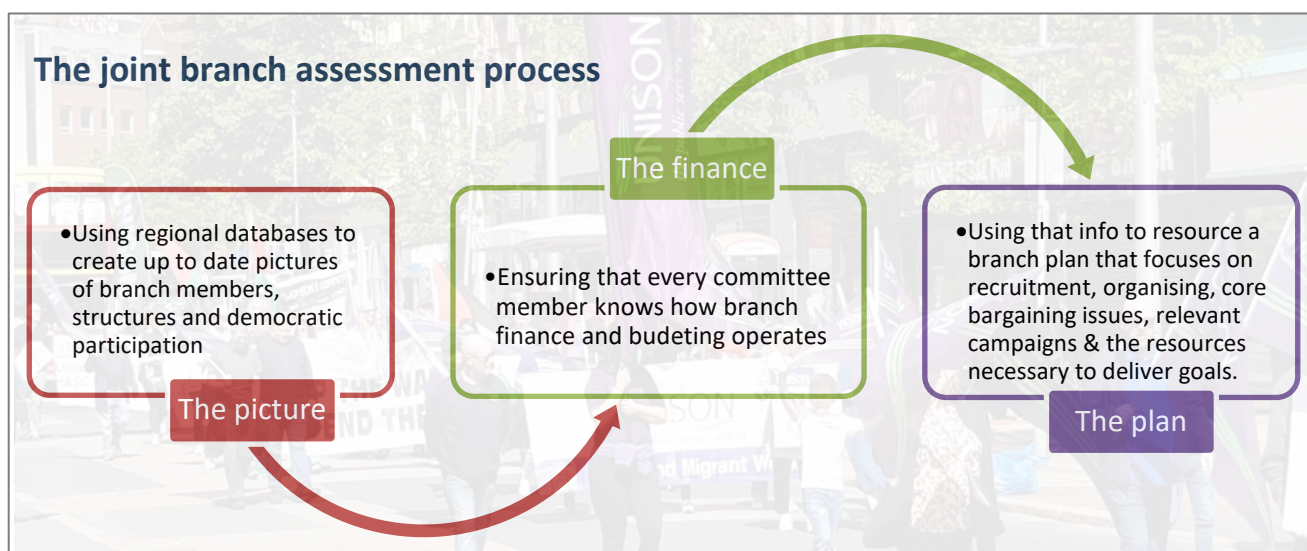


Table 7 highlights some of the most useful branch development indicators that are used by Regional Committee to measure the democratic health of branches and the key areas of support that may be needed. It shows the following key findings.

- The majority of branches have **paid release** resources available.
- All branches have completed their yearly **joint branch assessment** with varying degrees of success and submitted the online organising framework on time.
- All branches were **mapped online** to facilitate informed decision-making.
- Branch participation in **online communications activity** remains high.
- 19 of our 27 branches achieved **membership growth during 2024** with 6 in very limited retraction. Note that with the merger of UU Jordanstown branch and UU Coleraine Magee branch in January 2025, we now have 1 University of Ulster branch and 26 branches in total.
- The number of **new stewards** elected since 1 October 2024 is 88. Increasing this number remains an organising priority for the final quarter – particularly in branches who remain below target. The difficulty in encouraging new reps is a challenge across the union.
- Some core posts, in particular on equality, environment, and solidarity require special action from most branches.



- All branches should have their branch committee **minutes** on file as a legal and financial record. This is essential to ensure that decisions are democratically taken by quorate committees and recorded, including decisions relating to budgets, income and expenditure.
- Compliance with UNISON financial rules is indicated only by **financial returns**. However, further compliance measures include the tabling of OLBA reports at monthly meetings, monitoring of budgets, auditing, AGM reporting, and regional support on compliance.
- On **expenses**, Regional Council operates on the principle that volunteers should not be out of pocket for union activity, but nor is profit to be made from union funds. The new MOLE system has been launched and while online training is available, the HQ finance team have agreed to carry out a specific training course for NI branches.

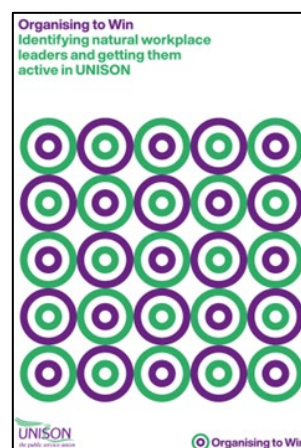
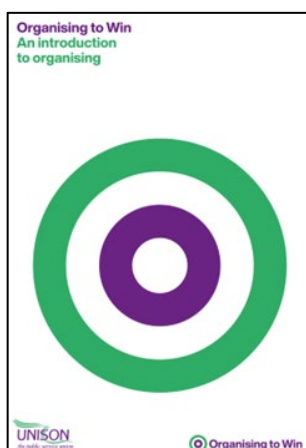


Table 7: Branch development indicators, 2024/25

Branch	Paid release	JBA / OF	Active online	Mapped	2024 growth	New stewards elected from 1 Oct 2024		Stewards ERA trained from Oct 2024		Branch minutes on File?	Submit Finance return on time
						F	M	F	M		
Belfast City Hospital	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+20	2	2	3	0	Yes	Yes
Belfast Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	-10	1	0	3	0	Yes	Yes
Causeway	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+14	3	1	0	0	Yes	Yes
Community & Vol	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+12	0	0	2	0	Yes	Yes
Craigavon Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+41	1	0	2	1	Yes	Yes
Derry Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	-4	2	0	1	0	Yes	Yes
Down Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+222	7	2	6	1	Yes	Yes
Down & Lisburn	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+150	7	3	3	0	Yes	Yes
Foyle Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+87	3	0	2	1	Yes	Yes
Greenpark Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+13	3	2	1	1	Yes	Yes
Health Agencies	A&W	Yes	Yes	Online	+39	0	0	1	1	Yes	Yes
Mater Hospital	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	-5	0	0	1	0	Yes	Yes
N & W Belfast	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+115	0	0	2	0	Yes	Yes
NE Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+196	4	1	0	1	Yes	Yes
Newry & Mourne	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+67	0	1	0	1	Yes	Yes
NI Ambulance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	-79	1	1	0	3	Yes	Yes
NI Blood Transfusion	A&W	Yes	Yes	Online	+14	0	0	0	0	Yes	Yes
Northern Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+246	13	7	1	3	Yes	Yes
Omagh & Fermanagh	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+69	5	2	3	0	Yes	Yes
Orchard H&SC	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	-8	1	0	0	0	Yes	Yes
RVH & Muckamore	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	-9	0	2	3	4	Yes	Yes
S & E Belfast	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+101	0	2	1	0	Yes	Yes
Southern Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+139	1	1	3	0	Yes	Yes
Sperrin & Devenish	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+117	1	0	1	0	Yes	Yes
UCHT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Online	+210	1	1	1	8	Yes	Yes
University of Ulster*	A&W	Yes	Yes	Online	-7	2	2	0	0	No	Yes
TOTAL					+1750	58	30	40	25		

*Merged on 1 January, 2025



RECRUITMENT & ORGANISING

Meeting targets?
Growth in full membership?
A detailed plan with a budget?
The democratic involvement of members?
Recruitment teams in place and active?
Led by elected reps?



BRANCH & WORKPLACE ORGANISATION

Compliance with the UNISON rule book and codes?
Financial compliance?
Good governance?
A network of elected, trained and active stewards and H&S reps?
An active, trained and effective branch committee with all core posts filled?
Compliance with proportionality and fair representation rules?



MEMBER PARTICIPATION

Were members facilitated:
..to fully take part in workplace and branch meetings?
..to fully access UNISON College NI and all member services?
..to participate in the democratic life of the union including speaking, voting and accessing information?
..to participate in events, rallies, demonstrations and similar activity?

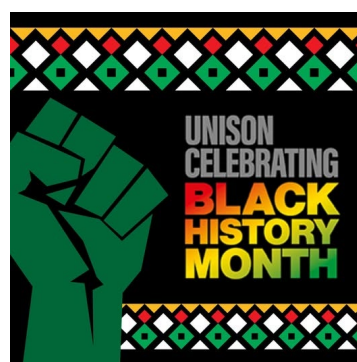
Measuring branch participation: Table 8 shows that branch participation in those areas required by Rule remains high. This includes at NDC, Regional Council and their respective service group conferences and meetings.

Participation in UNISON organised events and other marches, rallies and demonstrations remains high, including International Women's Day, May Day and the Durham Miners' Gala.

Table 8: Branch participation, 2024/25

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

**Merged on 1 January, 2025*



Our members are the union and our power and influence come from our collective strength. This is why maximising member engagement and participation is core to the Organising to Win strategy, building our union at workplace and branch level and improving our members' lives.

Earlier in this section we outlined some of the day-to-day base organising activity, as well as the more targeted and strategic organising activity and campaigns, that have built our membership and involved high levels of member participation. This section summarises some of the direct member engagement activity that has taken place over the year that has kept our profile high, encouraged more members to participate and become active; and helped to build the steward base during the 2024/25 period.

Annual General Meetings: Regional Committee, through the Branch Development Group, is currently reviewing branch AGM processes to ensure they follow best practice protocols and procedure, and that UNISON rules on proportionality and fair representation are maximised.

Most branch AGMs during 2025 were again a mix of in-person and hybrid. Regional Committee has prioritised the expansion of the steward base in preparation for the 2026 AGMs.

Direct member engagement: As previously reported, direct member engagement by branches has continued at a high level to recruit, identify collective issues to organise around; identify new stewards; and ensure that members are aware of our successes. Branches also continue to take advantage of the bulk emailing system, and the text messaging services available from the Regional Centre. The following are examples of direct member engagement from Galway House during 2024/25.

- Thousands of workplace visits, members meetings and 1-1 conversations undertaken by staff, including our BSOF Activity Fund Local Organisers.

- Thousands of phone calls with new joiners and UNISON members in specific sectors.
- Hundreds of member representations - physical and online.
- Distribution of tens of thousands of newsletters and surveys on health & safety and other key workplace issues.
- More than half of the members base were contacted by email and post to participate in ballots and other consultations.
- Hundreds of meetings with branch committees, JNFs, employers, lay negotiating teams and self-organised groups, involving nearly 1000 activists.
- 564 activist places (73% women) and 1720 member learning places (89% women) accessed in UNISON College NI.
- 18,541 followers on Facebook; and 1234 active followers on Instagram.
- Thousands of people accessing UNISON NI webinars, video content and films on health & safety and other campaigns.



Steward base: Identifying natural leaders and encouraging more members to participate and become active is central to our organising strategy and a key target within our branch and regional plans and projects. It is about ensuring local support for members across all employers and workplaces; lessening the burden on the current activist base; supporting members in their journey into activism through education and training; and supporting and encouraging our activists to become organisers themselves.

Table 7 shows that 88 new stewards have been elected since 1 October 2024. The branches who have elected the highest number of new stewards since 1 October 2024 are Northern Health (20) and Down and Lisburn (10). 205 training places being taken up across our Organising Stewards programme.

Table 9 shows proportionality by activist post.

- The combined activist figure (including officers, stewards, health & safety reps, ULRs, active members and contacts) is now 1232 – a 6% increase on the 2024 figure of 1164.
- The proportion of women across all positions is 71%.
- The number of branch officer positions is 296.
- The number of workplace stewards has risen to 566 – an increase of 9% on the 519 stewards in post last year and 17% higher than the 483 post held in 2023. This increase should have a positive impact on workplace representation by stewards and in filling core posts.
- Although all elected reps in NI undertake health & safety training, Regional Committee has agreed a specific campaign to increase the specialist number which currently sits at 79 health & safety reps across branches, in addition to the core H&S officer posts.

- Our 14 ULRs is an increase on last year's number, but with 26 branches there are gaps in cover which are being addressed by specific UNISON College initiatives.
- Our 52 new Active Members have been recruited through our private social care project and this new role will become a focus of wider organising activity across all branches during 2026.

The branch development group continues to emphasise the need:

- to prioritise programmes of workplace meetings and stewards elections;
- to encourage members to stand for election as local shop stewards;
- to build leadership, encourage activism and increase cover across all areas and workplaces;
- to ensure proportionality and fair representation and, in particular, to deal with the challenge of having too few women, black and minority ethnic stewards across branches; and
- to improve member participation in all ballots and consultative processes.



Table 9: Proportionality by activist post, 2023 - 2025

Activist Position	Total 2025	Women 2025	Men 2025	Total 2024	Women 2024	Men 2024	Total 2023	Women 2023	Men 2023
Branch Secretaries	44	73%	27%	42	69%	31%	41	71%	29%
Branch Chairs	35	71%	29%	37	65%	35%	43	60%	40%
Branch Treasurers	51	76%	24%	52	79%	21%	52	73%	27%
Other Branch Posts	166	62%	38%	170	64%	36%	122	61%	37%
Workplace Stewards	566	67%	33%	519	65%	35%	483	63%	36%
H&S Reps	79	62%	38%	82	70%	30%	-	-	-
ULR's	14	79%	21%	8	100%	0	4	50%	50%
Active Members	52	71%	29%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Contacts	225	87%	13%	254	88%	12%	176	89%	11%
Total	1232	71%	29%	1164	72%	28%	926	69%	31%

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



Set at 2% of subscription income by NDC, two funding streams are in place in NI to meet the demands of different branch and regional organising projects.

BSOF Fund – Annual BSOF funding is currently ringfenced to support 3 permanent Local Organisers working directly on BSOF projects in private social care and Non-EA education alongside the respective branch teams and the organising team.

In November 2024 the Steering Committee confirmed that both projects would be extended into 2025 in recognition of the recruitment and organising potential within both sectors and their status as a 'One UNISON' priority Organising to Win projects.

As outlined in the previous section, strategic organising activity in both sectors has resulted in significant membership growth, activism and material wins for our members.

BSOF Activity Fund – The significant outcomes from the 2024/25 BSOF activity fund recruitment and member engagement project were detailed in the previous section. This project involved 19 branches providing funding, supported by the Activity Fund, to enable the recruitment of 6 new fixed term Local Organisers in February 2024.

A new 12 month project commenced in April 2025 with £200,000+ branch funding subsidised from BSOF reserves. 21 branches are involved and 7 BSOF LOs are attached.

A specialist Local Organiser will shortly be employed to focus on a 12-month project organising black and migrant workers to boost our positive action programme.

Income: Total subscription income returned to Head Office in 2024 increased to £6,327,734. This represents an 11% increase on the previous year (£5,693,653.11). Total income returned to branches for 2024 was £1,669,472, a 15% increase on the previous year (£1,453,484).





Our UNISON College goes from strength to strength and we are pleased that it has been adopted as a model of good practice which is now being developed throughout UNISON.

UNISON College NI plays a central role in the success of the Regional Committee Organising strategy and, in particular, the key area of member engagement. During 2025 it has enabled thousands of members to engage with their union and achieve significant learning outcomes.

It has also created key opportunities for members to organise learning in their own workplaces and fight for paid time off to do so.

To build our activists skills base and to deliver on Organising to Win priorities, the College has delivered organising workshops at branch and regional level to over 80 activists. This was done alongside both our activist and member learning programmes.

The fact that UNISON College engagement figures, across both sections of the programme, continue to rise year-on-year is testament to the organising work of our staff team, as well as the commitment of our activists and members.

Much of this work doesn't make it into the report, but is crucial to our success. It includes one-to-one engagement with hundreds of members and activists – using education as a vehicle to support *them* to organise others.



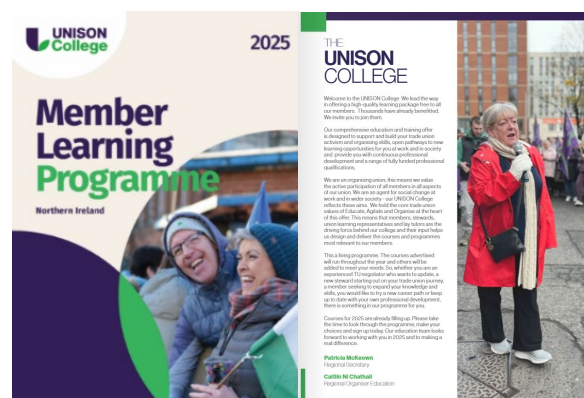
Our success during 2024/25

- 564 places were accessed on our 2024/25 trade union activist education programme – a 5% increase from 2023/24.
- 1720 places were accessed on our classroom-based member learning programme - a 44% increase from 2023/24.
- The participation of women was 73% on our activist programme and 89% on our member learning programme.
- 59 activist courses took place across 26 separate topics. 139 member learning courses took place across 34 separate topics.

Our team is:

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

The one-to-one bespoke development opportunities offered to our activists each year include areas such as building confidence; public speaking and drafting communications; and the countless wraparound support sessions for our members undertaking accredited learning.



UNISON activists are the driving force behind our organising, bargaining and campaigning activity. As a result, our trade union education and activist development programme sits at the heart of our UNISON College offer.

Our priority objective is to **Educate, Agitate and Organise** our members. We do this, not only through mandatory stewards and officer training, but also by building upon those foundations with political education, organising and campaigning skills.



During 2024/25 our offer to new stewards included a 2-day Organising stewards stage 3 module. This is mandatory for all new and existing stewards and provides a more in-depth opportunity for activists to explore issues such as challenging racism and promoting equality, as well as building on the Organising to Win skills and theory discussed in Stage 1.

There has been an upsurge in branches accessing branch-based learning and development training. This was delivered to 38% of our branch committees in their local areas and remaining branches will benefit from this training in the coming year.

While we endeavor to be as flexible as possible with our activists to ensure that they can access vital development and support in their local areas, the UNISON Centre in Belfast and our North West Support Centre continue to provide the core programme offer.

Whilst these central courses are more difficult to populate, they provide activists and members with an important opportunity for a joint learning experience. They are able to look beyond branch boundaries to be energized and excited by an exchange of ideas and possibilities.

Table 10 shows that 26 different course topics, 120 separate sessions and 564 student places (73% women) were accessed by activists during 2024/25.

This is a 5% increase in the number of places accessed during 2023/24 (538) and is 22% higher than those accessed in 2022/23 (464).

This increase in participation provides compelling evidence that we are succeeding in our commitment to deliver an education programme that is flexible and that meets the needs of all activists and particularly new stewards.

We also delivered 10 branch-based learning days, and 3 sessions for one-to-one activist support.



To maximise the participation of members from different employers and groups, our **Organising steward courses** were offered in both traditional and flexible formats this year. This contributed to an increase in participation across modules 1, 2 and 3, particularly from our members in private social care and schools who have limited release. It also helped us to deliver on our commitment to offer all stewards training within a month of election.

This year we expanded the offer to all existing reps who wanted to experience the stewards training with fresh eyes. To make the programme as flexible as possible, we also offered activist sessions in our Belfast office on Wednesday evenings.



This flexibility extended to other activist courses and learning sessions and included:

- offering additional courses when required;
- running courses with reduced numbers to ensure that everyone has access;
- not turning away any activist when we are at capacity but instead bringing in another tutor and splitting the group;
- organising one-to-one modular catch-up sessions with reps who missed training modules; and
- offering weekend development programmes with self-organised groups

This was all achieved thanks to the flexibility and commitment of our tutors and has resulted in 205 reps being trained on *The Organising steward stages 1, 2 and 3 modules* during the 2024/25 programme.

- Module 1 ran 5 times with 57 students (61% women).
- Module 2 ran 6 times with 62 students (63% women).
- Module 3 ran 6 times with 86 students (70% women).

This was 11% more reps than the 185 trained last year. Many of these activists have continued with their education, completing a range of other UNISON courses.

Overall, the proportion of women trained as stewards was 65%. Increasing the number and proportion of elected, trained and active women stewards remains a Regional Committee priority.

Increasing the participation and development of new and existing stewards on general **stewards, representation & negotiating courses** was also a priority this year.

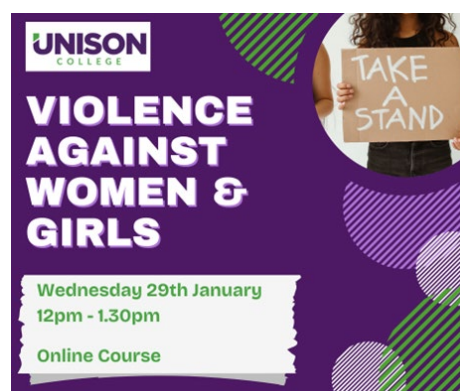
Significant outreach took place, resulting in a total of 48 activists (81% women) attending courses on 5 topics. This was a 20% year-on-year increase in participation compared to the 39 participants attending in 2023/24.

Courses included the following.

- *Grievances and disciplinary* - 24 reps (83% women).
- *Menopause, a workplace issue* - 5 reps (100% women).
- *Supporting members to write NMC, HSCP, NISCC statements* - 3 reps (100% women).
- *Employment law review* - 8 reps (63% women).
- *Understanding equality legislation* - 8 reps (78% women).

There was also increased flexibility with some courses running on low numbers and with adapted training to suit learner needs.

Campaigning, equality & human rights: 66 activists (67% women) participated in 6 course topics focused on supporting, campaigning and representing members on equality issues. This will be a priority area for increased participation for 2025/26.



Courses included the following.

- *Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS)* – 16 reps (38% women).
- *Challenging racism* – 2 reps (100% women).
- *Discussing violence against women and girls* – 4 reps (75% women).

- *Social media and organised racism* - 15 reps (73% women).
- *Trans ally* – 24 reps (71% women).
- *Gender inequalities* – 5 reps (100% women).

Many of the 14 sessions held were delivered in conjunction with our self-organised groups. In addition to these courses, UNISON also hosted related events with our equality partners

Health & safety: 40 activists (53% women) attended *Health & safety modules 1 and 2* training this year. A campaign to identify new H&S reps in the private social care sector is being launched in November 2025, prior to a general roll-out across all branches.

Table 11 shows that our health and safety offer supporting members, both individually and in the workplace, also continues to be in high demand.

Courses included the following.

- *Suicide first aid* - 10 members (60% women).
- *Managing stress* - 17 members (82% women).
- *Mental health as a workplace issue* - 22 members (82% women).
- *Managing challenging behaviour* - 75 members (99% women).
- *Managing conflict* - 127 members (97% women).



Branch officers: 5 *branch chairs* (100% women) and 6 *branch secretaries* (83% women) received training in their roles this year. Our branch welfare officers and treasurers attended the central training offered by UNISON Learning and Organising department.

Women's development education: 58 women attended the 5 courses and 6 sessions in this section of the programme. 28 members attended the 3 *Pathways* courses, and 30 members attended the 2 *Women's health and history* courses.

In total, women's participation in the activist programme is 73%.



136 activists (78% women) accessed courses related to **Building new leaders and updating existing leaders**. This was almost three times the number of reps who attended these type of courses last year (47 reps).

Courses included the following.

- *How to hold effective meetings* - 8 reps (63% women).
- *Organising to Win* - 80 reps (91% women).
- *Young members development weekend* - 10 reps (60% women).
- *ERA refresher* - 24 reps (50% women).
- *Black and migrant workers development weekend* - 12 reps (67% women).
- *Content creation for digital organising* - 2 reps (100% women).

We again delivered on our commitment to be flexible and adaptive to need by offering additional courses to meet demand from activists and organisers.

Partnering with self-organised groups: As stated previously, our self-organised and special issues groups continue to work closely with the programme to deliver courses and advise on content.

During the 2025 we delivered 2 development weekends with our Black & Migrant Workers' Group and our Young Members' Forum. Crucially these weekends also re-established our childcare provision to allow all activists to actively participate in learning opportunities.

Table 10: UNISON College NI trade union education courses, 1 Sept 2024 to 31 Aug 2025

Course topic	Course frequency			Number of Student Places		
	No. of days per course	No. of Courses per topic	Total Sessions	Total	F	M
STEWARDS INDUCTION						
The Organising Steward (Module 1)	4	5	20	57	35	22
The Organising Steward (Module 2)	3	6	18	62	39	23
The Organising Steward (Module 3)	2	6	12	86	60	16
2024/25		17	50	205	134 (65%)	71 (35%)
<i>2023/24</i>		<i>17</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>185</i>	<i>138 (75%)</i>	<i>47 (25%)</i>
STEWARDS, REPRESENTATION & NEGOTIATING						
Grievances and Disciplinary	2	2	4	24	20	4
Menopause a workplace issue	4	1	4	5	5	0
Supporting members to write statements <small>NMC/HCPC/NISCC</small>	1	1	1	3	3	0
Employment law review	1	1	1	8	5	3
Understanding equality legislation	1	1	1	8	6	2
2024/25		6	11	48	39 (81%)	9 (19%)
<i>2023/24</i>		<i>7</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>30 (75%)</i>	<i>10</i>
CAMPAIGNING, EQUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS						
Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS)	3	2	6	16	6	10
Challenging Racism	1	1	1	2	2	0
Discussing Violence against women and Girls	1	2	2	4	3	1
Social media and organised racism	1	1	1	15	11	4
Trans ally	1	3	3	24	17	7
Gender inequalities	1	1	1	5	5	0
2024/25		10	14	66	44 (67%)	22 (33%)
<i>2023/24</i>		<i>12</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>121</i>	<i>89 (74%)</i>	<i>32 (26%)</i>
HEALTH & SAFETY REPS						
Health & Safety Module 1	3	3	9	26	9	17
Health & Safety Module 2	1	3	3	14	12	2
2024/25		6	12	40	21 (53%)	19 (47%)
<i>2023/24</i>		<i>6</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>29 (45%)</i>	<i>36 (55%)</i>
BRANCH OFFICER TRAINING						
Branch Chairs	2	1	2	5	5	0
Branch Secretary	2	1	2	6	5	1
2024/25		2	4	11	10 (91%)	1 (9%)
<i>2023/24</i>		<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>15 (71%)</i>	<i>6 (29%)</i>
WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT TRAINING						
Pathways	2	3	3	28	28	0
Women's health & history	2	2	3	30	30	0
2024/25		5	6	58	58 (100%)	0
<i>2023/24</i>		<i>6</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>59 (100%)</i>	<i>0</i>
BUILDING NEW LEADERS & UPDATING EXISTING LEADERS						
Effective meetings	1	1	1	8	5	3
Organising to Win	1	5	5	80	73	7
Young Members Development weekend	3	1	3	10	6	4
ERA refresher	2	3	6	24	12	12
Black and Migrant workers development weekend	4	1	4	12	8	4
Content creation for Digital Organising	2	2	4	2	2	0
2024/25		13	23	136	106 (78%)	30 (22%)
<i>2023/24</i>		<i>8</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>37 (79%)</i>	<i>10 (21%)</i>
TOTAL 2024/25		59	120	564	412 (73%)	152(27%)
<i>Total 2023/24</i>		<i>57</i>	<i>139</i>	<i>538</i>	<i>397 (74%)</i>	<i>141 (26%)</i>

Our member learning programme continues to be a key area of member engagement and our organising activity has resulted in UNISON being well established and respected as a key provider in the adult education sector.

As a result, we have been able to secure additional resources for our members to secure accredited learning opportunities that provide secure and higher paid employment. In addition to workplace-based learning organised by our team of Union Learning Reps (ULRs), we also retain a significant member learning package in our regional offices in Belfast and Derry.

In workplaces across NI, our activists and staff team capitalised on all organising opportunities to engage with members and promote learning opportunities of interest to them in areas such as administration of medications and dealing with challenging behaviour.

Table 11 shows that 1720 students (89% women) participated on the 34 separate classroom-based courses during 2024/25.

Participation was spread over 139 sessions and was up 44% from the 1196 students attending in 2023/24.

This year we expanded our organising campaign to increase member access to our **workplace programme**. A temporary BSOF Local Organiser has been working with branches and reps to establish learning opportunities in workplaces through a number of **Lunch and Learn** sessions. These events allow our activists and organisers the opportunity to organise around workplace learning over lunch breaks in areas where we have no formal learning agreement.

This year the focus remained on branches and members with historically low uptake on our workplace programme. In particular, we engaged with the hardest to reach members who are usually in regional branches with no fixed workplace.

Members continue to enjoy the flexibility of the **eLearning** opportunities provided by the programme. We have over 1000 licences issued on Nursing Times and Skills Academy with members completing an average of 5-10 courses a year. The extent of access to eLearning licences during 2024/25 is the same as last year with 600 *Skills Academy* courses accessed and 30 *Nursing Times* courses accessed.



eLearning provides an opportunity to pull members together when they only have a short window for education. It is particularly useful during Lunch and Learn sessions

Continuous professional development (CPD) courses continued to be a major contributor to the Programme and are offered as either a physical course, or an E learning option through the Nursing Times. During 2024/25 courses included *Dignity at the heart of social care* - 7 students (100% women).



The **Union Learning 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 courses.

- a *Supporting teaching and learning diploma* - 56 students (98% women).
- IELTS English language and OET language test for healthcare professionals - 65 students (57% women).
- *Open University modules, including K102 Introduction to health and social care* – 391 students (92% women).
- *OCN level 2 Managing challenging behaviour in the classroom* – 75 students (99% women).



Northern Ireland K102 Unison students 2024/25

Open University: Through our partnership with the Open University, we offer the *K102 module* to our members. Figures show that UNISON students achieve better outcomes on OU courses as a result of the wrap around support offered by UNISON College.

Essential skills: We continue to offer places on courses as part of Union Learn Partnerships with 55 members (87% women) gaining places this year in English, Maths and ICT.

UNISON continues to actively promote a range of **grants** towards trade union studies, women's studies, GCSEs, vocational courses and the Open University.

Local UNISON reps are involved in **HSC Trust education/learning partnerships**. The nature of these varies from Trust to Trust and UNISON has a number of seats on each one. The focus of these partnerships is widening participation and developing new pathways

for staff to progress in areas such as essential skills.



Our **K102 programme** is hosted through these partnerships 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.

As mentioned in last year's report, our 2024/25 bid was uplifted under the Minister's Skills Fund by 322% allowing us to offer an unprecedented number of places.

In addition, the Department of Health offered K102 places to each HSC Trust. Those Trusts contacted UNISON College in order to fill the places being offered by the Department. Once these students finish K102 they are offered interview skills courses and support in application for the fully funded nursing programme.

UNISON is also represented on a number of external bodies relating to learning and career development including the NI Social Care Council Working Group on HSC qualifications and the Northern Trust Support Workers Learning & Development Group.



Table 11: UNISON College NI member learning courses, 1 Oct 2023 to 31 Aug 2024

Course topic	No. of Courses Per topic	No. of student places		
		Total	F	M
Supporting yourself and others: Classroom-based				
Neurodiversity Awareness	1	10	7	3
Prevention of Frailty - Growing older, Growing Stronger	1	17	15	2
Dementia an introduction	2	25	25	0
Dementia managing stress and distress	2	24	13	11
Suicide first aid	1	10	6	4
Autism multi topic day	1	24	24	0
Autism emotional regulation	1	18	18	0
Dignity at the heart of social care	1	7	7	0
Menopause Awareness	1	5	5	0
Makaton Level 1	3	45	44	1
Managing stress	2	17	14	3
Mental Health as a workplace issue	3	22	18	4
Planning for retirement	1	35	30	5
Building Confidence & Resilience	1	7	6	1
Psychology & Biology Behind Addiction	1	9	7	2
IELTS English language and OET language test	30	65	37	28
Supporting you in your job: Classroom-based				
Managing challenging behaviour OCN level 2	1	75	74	1
Anxiety based school avoidance	1	47	46	1
Managing conflict	4	127	123	4
Supporting Children's Emotional Regulation	1	10	9	1
Communication from the inside out	2	37	34	3
Communicating with impact	1	6	5	1
Medications for Homecare Support Workers	1	12	10	2
ADHD Awareness	8	301	293	8
Digi Skills	2	2	3	0
Promoting Wellbeing & Promoting Burnout	1	5	3	2
Supporting Teaching and learning Diploma	3	56	55	1
Interview skills	6	66	58	6
K102	2	391	361	30
OET ILETS Preparation classes	42	85	48	37
Essential skills	4	55	48	7
Revalidation	2	11	9	3
Less stress, more success	1	51	44	7
Lunch and Learn	5	43	35	8
TOTAL 2024/25	139	1720	1525 (89%)	195 (11%)
Total 2023/24	108	1196	1059 (89%)	137 (11%)
Additional E- Learning courses				
Skills Academy – e learning course access by members	600			
Nursing Times – e learning course access by members	30			



Participation and structures

PROPORTIONALITY, FAIR REPRESENTATION & OPERATION OF UNISON NI STRUCTURES

Women make up 79% of our total full membership.

The Rule Book requires proportionality and the Code of Good Branch Practice and other equality codes give guidance on achieving it.

Regional Council /Regional Committee holds the monitoring function. Branches and other lay structures fully co-operate to ensure that delegates are proportional on the basis of gender. It is the Regional Council / Regional Committee role to ensure that branches and all structures, including conference delegations, comply with both proportionality and fair representation rules. Branch attendance at the 2024 Council was 96%. The proportion of women delegates was 72%.

Lay structures are also designed to ensure positive action in the sectors covered by our self-organised groups. Fair representation is based on the profile of the membership and

includes occupation, sector, geography and community background.

The **Regional Committee** has met 4 times since last Regional Council. The Committee currently has 39 members, and its composition stands at 85% women. The NI NEC members are ex-officio. All meetings were quorate. Progress on UNISON's 4 core objectives form the agenda.

Regional Committee members also devote additional time to organising priorities through our subgroups as set out in Table 12 below.



Table 12: Regional Committee sub-structures, 2024/25

Branch development group	Education group	Branch Support & Organising Fund Group	Regional implementation group
Stephanie Greenwood Kevin Hillick Alastair Long Margaret McKee Catherine McKenna Aine Brennan	Stephanie Greenwood Kevin Hillick Alastair Long Margaret McKee Catherine McKenna Dawn Emerson Alison McConaghie Union learning reps and lay tutors	Stephanie Greenwood Kevin Hillick Alastair Long Margaret McKee Catherine McKenna Joint Chairs of service groups and SOGs	Stephanie Greenwood Kevin Hillick Alastair Long Margaret McKee Catherine McKenna
			Standing Orders Committee RIG members as above. Gillian Foley Deborah Yapicioz

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

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

NEC members for NI, Margaret McKee, Alastair Long and Catherine McKenna make reports to Regional Committee and reflect the views of Regional Committee / Regional Council back to the NEC. Each also has a lead role in a range of our campaigns including equality and human rights, organising and global solidarity.

Catherine is elected UNISON President 2025/26; Alastair is elected Chair of the NEC Finance Committee; and Margaret is elected Chair and Vice Chair, respectively, of the NEC International Committee and NEC Staffing Committee.

Catherine is the 3rd UNISON President to be elected from our region and joins Margaret McKee and Lucia McKeever. We are extremely proud to have produced 3 women to lead the union over the past decade.

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

The **Standing Orders Committee** carries out a Standing Orders function for Regional Council.

The **Branch Support & Organising Fund Group** is the lay steering group that oversees the operation of BSOF in NI.

Schools support worker from Northern Ireland is new UNISON president

New presidential team elected for the union



Posted on 23 June 2025
Catherine McKenna, who works for the Education Authority in Northern Ireland, is the new president of UNISON, the UK's largest union.

Latest news



Underpaid, undervalued, unseen – until now
Posted on August 4, 2025 by Janey Starling

In June 2025, UNISON NI celebrated the election of Catherine McKenna as President of UNISON. Catherine works for the Education Authority in special needs transport and in school meals and is the co-chair of Belfast Education branch. She has served on the NEC for the past four years.

Each year, the UNISON President nominates Presidential projects that they encourage branches and activists to donate to. Catherine has chosen **Women in Hebron**, a Palestinian fair-trade co-operative that is based in the city of Hebron in the West Bank and is supported by our own NI Women's Committee.



Welcome to Women in Hebron! We are a unique cooperative that seeks to economically empower Palestinian women and their families, as well as encourage the passing down of Palestinian culture and traditional handicraft products to younger generations. Creating handicrafts not only helps to keep Palestinian traditions alive, but also creates economic opportunity, and allows these women to resist the narrative of occupation in Palestine.



SELF-ORGANISED GROUPS AND SPECIAL ISSUE GROUPS

Giving voice to tackling disadvantage and combating discrimination

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

With the NI Executive, we are once again engaged in challenging on the policy and legislative deficits in our equality and human rights laws. As reported in Section 3, we also advance much of this work through our coalitions and allies.

The Regional Committee continues to support and take strategic advice from our regional self-organised and special interest groups. It also encourages our SOGs to support the establishment of branch or area based SOGs. 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.

A review of self-organised groups was agreed at 2024 Regional Council and commenced in early 2025. Its scope is to review their operation at branch and regional level against the Rules and Guidance set out by the NEC, to ensure that the priorities are mainstreamed into the work of the union.

The 1st stage of the review reported in June 2025 and a questionnaire for all members of

SOGs and networks was distributed in September to ascertain current engagement levels.

In early 2026, SOGs will present new or amended Constitutions to the incoming Regional Committee for approval using existing UNISON models. Further Regional Committee recommendations arising from the 1st stage review include:

- liaison to ensure that core UNISON equality policies and the work of the Equality Coalition is reflected on agendas;
- that office bearers are Rule compliant;
- increased liaison between our SOGs and bargaining structures;
- branch committees should make provision in their budgets for spend to develop self-organisation;
- branches should be encouraging group members to take part in the wider life of the branch, including engaging in the education programme, standing for office and ensuring that branch delegations are reflective of our membership base.



Women's Committee

Participation: The Women's Committee has 61 members from 26 branches and held 4 meetings in the year to date. The Joint Chairs are Donna Jordan and Amanda Irvine.

Over the past year, Committee members participated extensively in a wide range of organising and campaigning activity with all NI branches participating in at least one regional event. Our local women's committees also continue to organise events and ongoing campaigns within their own

branches, with particular activity taking place during International Women's Day.

The theme of **International Women's Day (IWD)** on 8th March 2025 was 'Solidarity beyond borders: Women for world peace'. UNISON once again had the largest turnout at the Belfast march and rally. The Women's Committee IWD event focused on new legislation and bystander interventions. A panel discussion took place and male activists were invited to participate.

Our Southern Area Women's Committee took part in an IWD walk on 2 March in Armagh alongside Women's Aid. The focus was to support the campaign to end violence against women and girls.



Our Health Agencies branch, in conjunction with the Derry City and Strabane Council, held a panel discussion on 8 March chaired by the Regional Secretary. The focus was on leadership, engaging young women in activism and the trade union movement. Speakers included Beverly Simpson (UNISON Black & Migrant Workers' Group), Jessica McVeigh (UNISON Young Members' Forum), Caoimhe Quigley (UNISON LGBT+ Group) and speakers from Foyle Women's Aid and Disability Action. The event was opened by the 1st black woman Mayor of Derry City & Strabane, Lilian Seenoi-Barr and included a performance from the Hive Choir and pupils from Lisneal, organised by FUSE arts.

As part of IWD activity all branches ran events, visited workplaces, held information stalls, or distributed promotional materials.

The Committee's **Work Programme** included:

- ensuring the participation of women at all levels in the union;
- tackling violence against women - including domestic violence and abuse, human trafficking, combating sexual harassment at work and the bystander approach;
- highlighting the disproportionate impact of austerity on women and supporting gender budgeting;
- ensuring that the bargaining agenda reflects women's health needs;

- supporting the campaigns for a violence against women and girls strategy and a women's health strategy.

World Menopause Day took place on 18 October 2024 and Committee members held events in various workplaces to raise awareness that menopause is a workplace issue.

RO Danielle McCusker and Policy Organiser Caoimhe McNeill represent UNISON on the Steering Group for the **Women's Health Strategy**. Both attended the launch of the women's health listening exercise in Parliament Buildings on 11th November 2024. The launch was the beginning of a programme of work to hear from women across NI on their priorities, perspectives and experiences of women's health and healthcare provision.

The **Reclaim the Night rally** took place on 30 November 2024 in Belfast. Committee members once again took to the streets to demand an end to gender based violence. Naomi Green spoke at the rally, drawing on her extensive experience as a community worker and her research background in the inclusion and integration of Muslims in NI.

The Committee participated in the **Period Dignity** consultation which seeks to address the need for free period products to be available within many public buildings, schools and youth settings and EA administrative accommodation.

On Friday 6 December, the Committee held a viewing of the **Bystander Movement** film that explores the role of bystanders in perpetuating gender violence, particularly sexual harassment and assault. The bystander approach was developed by Jackson Katz and colleagues and emphasises how friends, classmates, team-mates and co-workers can challenge harmful norms and actively prevent violence. It argues that appealing to people as potential leaders who can challenge sexist cultural norms is key to creating positive change.

Committee members donated personal care boxes for **women from Sudan arriving to NI seeking international protection and asylum**. This made a real difference to ease the trauma that they experience in reaching Belfast, often fleeing violence and leaving family members (sometimes their own children) to seek safety.



Committee members attended a UNISON 'Violence in the workplace' webinar to mark the **United Nations international day to end violence against women and girls**. It is unacceptable that so many workers are being assaulted for simply doing their jobs. Many UNISON members work directly with the public in areas where they are often placed at increased risk of being attacked.

The webinar explored experiences of dealing with violence in the workplace, including domestic violence, and UNISON's work in campaigning for an end to violence at work in public services.

To mark **maternal mental health week** in May 2025, Committee members attended an event in the Shankill Shared Women's Centre led by the Mas Project (Maternal Advocacy and Support) on supporting women and reducing stigma.

At the Committee's AGM in September the Mas Project spoke about perinatal community-based peer support and a number of their campaigns.

In February 2025, over 30 NI delegates attended **UNISON Women's Conference** in Edinburgh. The conference theme was 'Unite for more rights', with a strong emphasis on championing trans rights, healthcare, and childcare. The conference also addressed issues like period poverty and the impact of menstruation on working life.

A key aspect of the conference was building solidarity between women and trans comrades. Conference provided a platform for sharing experiences and developing strategies for positive change. It also included a discussion on the importance of recognising the rights that previous generations have won and built on to break down barriers to equality.

Regional Delegates Donna Jordan and Amanda Irvine moved the NI motions on childcare and the women's health strategy for NI.

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

The **ICTU Women's Seminar** was held in Dundalk on 20 and 21 March 2025. It focussed on organising workplaces; addressing the health and safety inequalities faced by women; the vital roles of trade unions in combating racism and misogyny; and promoting equality and solidarity, particularly in the face of rising authoritarianism and attacks on democracy.

The **Council of the Isles** took place on 23 and 24 January 2025 hosted by the NIC-ITU Women's Committee in Derry. This year's theme was 'Tackling the far right, extremism and misogyny'. Unfortunately, the event was cut short due to storm Eowyn.



The **NIC-ICTU Conference** took place in November. Deborah Yapicioz spoke at the fringe event 'Ending Violence against women and girls in work and in society – what can trade unions do?' Since 2020 there have been over 24 women murdered in NI and we now have one of the highest femicide rates in Western Europe.

The Committee congratulated Jill Weir (Omagh & Fermanagh branch) who was recently elected as the first female chair of the Fermanagh Council of Trade Unions since it was established in 1919.

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

The LGBT+ Group has met 6 times since last Regional Council. It has 120 registered members from 14 branches. Our Group continues to be regarded as the trade union leader on LGBT+ campaigns, and members continue to attend numerous events, festivals and protests - representing, campaigning, and promoting UNISON.

Increasing participation: Participation on the Group continues to grow with members increasingly stepping into posts at regional and national level. The Group regularly works with members from other self-organised groups and across branches on recruitment, organising and other campaigns, including setting up workplace stalls to increase the visibility of our LGBT+ members.

2025 Pride: There has been a high turnout from branches, activists and our allies at local Pride events, including in Omagh, Causeway, Lurgan, Newry, Fermanagh, Foyle as well as at Ballymena's first Pride. The Group have made a commitment to support local towns in their first Pride events. At the Belfast Pride Awards in June, UNISON won the "Pride Ally Union Award" for the 2nd year in a row. This was in recognition of our campaigning work and support for the LGBT+ community in the workplace.

Transgender- Supreme court ruling: While not directly applicable to NI, the UK Supreme Court ruled that in the Equality Act 2010 'sex' means biological sex. UNISON factsheets on transgender workers' rights, non-binary workers and our trans equality model policy have now been updated following the Ruling. These have been reviewed by legal experts and the Group are encouraging all members to use them in their workplaces. The Group is also supporting our allies who are affected. UNISON has made a submission to the recent ECNI consultation.

LGBTQIA+ awareness week 2025 stressed the importance of support for a marginalised community and in May Group members participated in a Derry event where the AIDS Memorial Quilt was displayed for the first

time in 30 years. It was well attended by UNISON members who first initiated Awareness Week, as well as LGBTQIA+ organisations Rainbow and Foyle Pride.

The section of the Quilt on display is a tribute to those who died of AIDS and the Group were privileged to have members of the family of one of the event's founders, Patrick Doherty, present. Patrick, who died from the disease, was fondly remembered by his family who were present at the launch. His sister Karen gave a moving and poignant speech about the ongoing need for support for the LGBTQIA+ community locally.



The Group has worked on producing a **2026 LGBT+ Calendar**. The calendar celebrates how far the LGBT+ community has come and highlights important dates, activities and information for support with external organisations. With the support of branches purchasing the calendars, the Group is planning to make donations to chosen charities - Rainbow Refugees, Belfast Trans Resource Centre and Positive Life NI.

In November 2024, 12 delegates and visitors from UNISON NI travelled to the **UNISON LGBT+ conference** in Edinburgh. This was the largest contingent ever to travel to conference where delegates celebrated the Year of LGBT+ Workers. The Group's motion on LGBT+ reproductive justice was unanimously supported and the Group's "Our Journeys" film was played as part of the celebrations. Group delegates will be attending 2025 conference in Edinburgh in November and have submitted two motions - Campaigning for LGBT+ rights in every region and Failing transgender and gender diverse youth in NI.

Communications The Group has grown its online presence on Facebook and TikTok and have run two specific social media campaigns in the year to date. During Lesbian Visibility Week they shared daily videos of either a lesbian member sharing why visibility was important to them or highlighting UNISON NI policy and campaigns relating to lesbians.

During LGBTQIA+ Awareness week (which runs around International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersex Discrimination, and Transphobia) videos of LGBT+ group activists were showcased. Allies also shared their reflections on the importance of activism and allyship, specifically promoting the value of the Trans Ally training offered by UNISON College NI.



The work of the LGBT+ Group is supported by Noreen Robinson, Area Organiser.



Black & Migrant Workers' Group

The Black and Migrant Workers (B&MW) Group met 11 times this year and has 23 members (48% women). Additional members have also joined the WhatsApp group and Facebook page.

Importantly, there are now 3 separate branch-based WhatsApp groups in Newry and Mourne, Craigavon Health and Foyle Health branches. Foyle branch has also recently established a local Black & Migrant Workers Group and its first meeting is planned to coincide with Black History month in October 2025.

This year was marked by increased collaboration with our Strategic Organising Unit's private social care project, our campaigning on immigration and our residential weekend that took place in July.

Other key areas of our **workplan** included:

- providing support to members with immigration advice and possible representation, as well as support for branches dealing with cases;
- continuing to work with the private social care project to fight back against the Government White Paper on immigration and current Certificate of Sponsorship system;

- increasing the representation and participation of black and migrant workers at all levels of our union – including as stewards and officers in branches;
- working with branches to support our B&MW members in the face of increased racist intimidation and to establish local B&MW networks; and
- develop our own materials and continuing to participate in events to promote UNISON as a place of diversity and anti-racism.



Participation and membership trends:

Information on the ethnic background of our membership relies on members filling in ethnic monitoring information. This is automatically available online but requires branches to ensure that monitoring stickers are added to their paper recruitment forms.

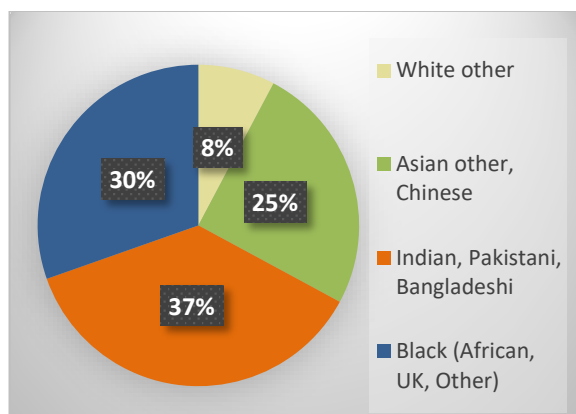
The data provides an indication of where members continue to be recruited by HSC Trusts and private social care providers.

The data shows the following trends.

- The vast majority of our B&MW work in healthcare.
- 68% of our B&MW members are women.
- The largest regions of origin of B&MW members are now India (37% state that they are Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi); Africa (30% state that they are Black African, Black UK or Black other) and Filipino (25% state that they are Filipino, Chinese or Asian other).

As there is no further international recruitment of healthcare staff, the recent increase in B&MW membership is likely to plateau with recruitment being confined to people already living and working here.

Fig. 15 – UNISON NI B&MW Membership – Self-reported ethnic background, 2025



The rise of the far right and ongoing racist riots and attacks on our black and migrant worker community has been extremely distressing. The recent events in Ballymena and Portadown continue to spread dread throughout BME communities, leading many newcomers to reconsider their decision to stay here. Many live in hostile areas and have, at times, been advised to 'stay home and hide'.

Our B&MW activists and our branches and senior leadership have continued to speak out, including participating and speaking at rallies, events, and conferences. There is a chilling sense that this is no longer just an isolated incident or 'time of year', but a new

reality that is not going to just go away and feeds off the same phenomena in other places and other countries. UNISON and our branches continue to organise, support and show solidarity.



Our bargainers continue to engage with employers on safety measures to protect our members against racist attacks at work and when travelling to and from work. Particularly through our co-convenorship of the Equality Coalition, we also continue to challenge Government and the public sector on the need for urgent interventions.

The exploitation of members on **Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS)** and changes in **immigration rules**, including a rise in the salary threshold, have also been big challenges for members this year. Having made plans to come and work here for a number of years, the new rules are taking away our members' right to work and stay in the UK or to have their family with them. This is a real tragedy for many and a focal point for UNISON and for joint work with our allies.

The issue of **repayment clauses** has been less prominent this year, and issues reported have led to successful challenges with employers. However, many disciplinarys still lead to dismissal and members have sometimes been left unable to get a new sponsor, leaving them no option but uproot and leave with their family.

UNISON continues to produce very useful briefings to help activists and organisers navigate the ever-changing immigration rules.

Unfortunately, **Black Members Conference** in Llandudno in January was cancelled at the last minute due to a burst water pipe and our large delegation was forced to travel home. Only 6 delegates were able to attend the rescheduled conference in June in Brighton to present our motions.

The **Pamela Dooley summer school / Black leadership residential weekend** in July was a 2025 highlight. It opened with a birthday celebration and tribute to Pamela who started the group 20 years ago. Black Members Leadership training was then delivered by National Black Members' Committee chair, Adejare Oyewole.

The weekend was also our new UNISON President, Catherine McKenna's first official engagement. It was a wonderful event for both training and bonding and people left uplifted and inspired. The Group was very grateful to all branches who sent donations or supported the weekend. The creche (sourced by UNISON College NI) was also a valuable addition as several members would not have been able to come without it.

Following the event, 3 of the participants have become more involved with their branch. 2 of these have been elected as stewards and are booked for training.

Access to immigration advice through UNISON legal services: The Group is happy to report a real breakthrough on immigration advice. We continue to have access to the JCWI helpline via UNISON Direct and we run

immigration advice clinics on every second Thursday of the month with a solicitor from Worthington solicitors. Appointments can be booked through n.donnelly@unison.co.uk.

However, when there is a need for a solicitor's intervention, we can now also refer some cases to the solicitor for follow up actions. This has been a long-awaited development, and several members and families have been able to access practical support in the last 12 months. In addition, an independent group has also started to use our offices for level 1 immigration clinics. Our members are welcome to register for these as well through their own website: www.rightsandsecurity.org/advice-service/.

Services to members: Face to face English classes (both OET and IELTS) continue. We receive referrals from refugee / Asylum seeker support organisations as well as from other community organisations with international volunteers. Several UNISON members working as HCAs have since completed their English test and have gone on to practice as nurses.

Table 13: Attendance at English classes, Nov 2024 - June 2025

Course	Attendance, 2024/25		
	Total	F	M
English classes	65	37	28

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



The Disability Group has met 3 times since last Regional Council. Branch nominations to the Group have increased with representation from 15 branches. We continue to encourage branches to take up their entitlement to 2 places.

One in four people in NI have a disability. A report from the Ulster University's Economic Policy Centre found that just over a third of disabled people in NI are in work compared with over half in the UK, and that a disabled person aged 16-24yrs is five times more likely to not be in employment, education or training than a non-disabled person.

Failure to address the barriers to work that disabled people face is a failure to recognise the contribution that disabled people make and represents a huge cost to our economy and society.

UNISON's disability self-organised structures place a heavy emphasis on access to employment; support while in employment; equal access to goods, facilities and services; and protection from discrimination.

Our regional Disability Group takes this work forward by encouraging branches to become involved and to promote the Group's agenda through the collective bargaining structures with employers.



The Group seeks to influence Government and public service policy and legislation through advising our regional structures and negotiators on the key issues to raise. We also work in partnership with the union's main allies in the Equality Coalition.

Developing our work programme and action plan needs the co-operation of UNISON branches and while this has improved

through increased nominations to the Group, there is more work to be done.

Our 2024/25 **work programme** prioritised the following issues.

- Monitoring the implementation of Accessibility/Disability Passports and disability leave in conjunction with our bargainers and activists across Health Trusts, the Education Authority and other employers.
- Direct engagement with UNISON Health Trust Chairs, working with them to progress our mental health in the workplace policy.
- Supporting branch engagement with Health Trusts on their Disability Action plans.
- Promoting the Access to Work (NI) Scheme at branch level and with our lead negotiators across all employers.
- Working with our UNISON colleagues in the Equality Coalition and the ICTU Disability Committee on pressing for the new Disability Strategy for NI and a Disability Employment Charter.
- Encouraging UNISON members and activists to undertake the training available through the UNISON College NI in both the activists and member learning elements of the programme.

Committees, conferences and events: UNISON is represented on the ICTU Disability Committee by Pam MacKenzie and Amanda Sweetlove; and on the UNISON National Disability Committee by Pam MacKenzie and Amanda Rutherford.

Pam MacKenzie and Linda Sage attended UNISON National Disabled Members Conference in late October 2024. This year's conference will be held in Liverpool from 25th to 27th October. Michael McCallion and Tanya Lundy will be attending from the Group.

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

The Retired Members Forum held 3 meetings during 2024 and has 24 members (62% women). It has representation from 12 branches.

Throughout the year, Forum members participated in various recruitment and organising initiatives, campaigns, lobbying and events. It also compiles a comprehensive quarterly newsletter to update members on all the important issues on its agenda.

Campaigns, lobbying and events: The Forum has continued to campaign and lobby on a series of key UNISON priorities.

As reported last year, the Forum played a significant role in the successful campaign that forced the Department for Infrastructure to halt changes to the eligibility criteria for the **concessionary fares scheme**. A final decision on application fees is yet to be made and the Forum continues to campaign against their introduction.



The Forum continues to campaign against **care home closures and evictions**. It is also highlighting issues such as misused contract clauses, the need for stronger rights for residents and the wider systemic issues in the care sector that lead to these problems. We continue to push for an Ethical Care Charter which promotes better pay and working conditions for care staff and higher-quality care for residents.

The Forum continues to highlight the **cost of living crisis** and the severe "heat or eat"

dilemma faced by many pensioners here. At NDC 2025, Conference agreed to lobby the government to reinstate **winter fuel allowance** for all pensioners. The Forum continues to oppose means-testing as creating a two-tier society.

The Forum also continues to support the campaign for the immediate payment of compensation to **WASPIs** (women against state pension injustice). When they were in opposition, Labour promised to fulfil the recommendations of the ombudsman if they were elected to power. A year on, the government has still not paid a penny.

Our retired members are active participants in the **NI Assembly All Party Group on Ageing and Older People**. Over the past year they have engaged directly with MLAs on issues such as the Winter Fuel Payment, the need for law prohibiting age discrimination and the need for strategic planning for an ageing population in the Programme for Government.

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

- UNISON NI Regional Committee – Trevor Doey
- National UNISON Retired Members Committee - Martin Gallagher
- UNISON Retired Members' Standing Orders Committee – Noel Muldoon
- UNISON Retired Members' Conference – Paul Allen
- UNISON NDC – Roberta Magee
- National Pensioners' Convention - Mary Ferris and Trevor Doey
- ICTU NI Conference - Angela Boorman and Archie Thomson
- ICTU Retired Members' Committee - Angela Boorman and Archie Thomson.

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

The Young Members' Forum met 5 times this year and its membership continues to grow with 19 members participating (68% women).

Participation and engagement: During the year Forum meetings were held online to maximise participation from young members across NI. The Forum also engages with young members in their own branches by holding recruitment events, stalls and other meetings.

In early 2025, the Forum surveyed young members across the region to establish how we could engage with them more successfully and what the possible barriers to activism might be.

The results revealed that:

- the key barriers to activism were identified as a lack of confidence and knowledge; and
- the preferred social media platform to engage with young people was Instagram

As a result of these findings the young members set up an Instagram page and decided to work with UNISON College NI to organise a residential development weekend.

In February 2025 the first **Young leaders development weekend** took place at the Killyhevlin Hotel in Enniskillen. Its focus was to engage and inspire not only the members of the Forum but to encourage participation and build confidence of young members across the region. It was well attended and thoroughly enjoyed by all participants.

Five Forum members participated in **UNISON National Young Members Conference** in November 2024 in Swansea. The Forum's motion, 'One wage for any age' was passed unanimously and delegates contributed to various debates including on Palestine Solidarity.

Working with other groups: Forum member, Jessica McVeigh joined speakers from our Black and Migrant Workers' Group, our LGBT+ Group, Foyle Women's Aid and Disability Action at an International Women's Day event in March opened by the Mayor of Derry City & Strabane.



The event showcased a school arts project which explores the history of the trade union movement, feminist change makers and how we can inspire and support the next generation of young women. It also included a performance from the Hive Choir and a short performance by Lisneal pupils organised by FUSE arts.

Young members month: Work is underway to organise promotional events for young members month in November.



The work of the Forum is supported by Claire Bolt, Area Organiser.

This section details the work of the UNISON NI Health & Safety Group as well as additional member-focused activity undertaken by UNISON NI during the year. The Group met 3 times during 2025 and includes all branch health and safety officers and. Members also attended a number of events and training sessions.

The Group's **work programme** includes:

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

International Workers Memorial Day: The Group marked International Workers' Memorial Day on April 28, 2025, with a wreath laying ceremony at Stormont to remember those who have died at work. The event's purpose is to "remember the dead and fight for the living" by raising awareness and advocating for better health and safety conditions for all workers.

This year's event was attended by Minister for the Economy, Dr. Caoimhe Archibald MLA, and had a significant delegation from UNISON branches, other unions and ICTU.



The Group is currently being reconstituted with new nominees being appointed on the NIC/ICTU H&S Committee. Carmen Biagioni from the Royal branch continues to represent UNISON NI on the national UNISON H&S committee.

The **UNISON NI Health and Safety Seminar** took place in February 2025 in Galway House and focused on 'Tackling violence in the public sector'. 37 delegates attended from 16 branches. Speakers included UNISON National Officer, Joe Donnelly and Bryan Monson, from the NIHSE. Claire Shevlin from Thompsons solicitors also presented on the Personal Injury process and H&S legislation.

In November 2025 our Strategic Organising Unit will launch **No Risk November**, a health & safety recruitment and organising project for members in the private social care sector. Member engagement commenced in mid-September with a H&S survey going to all members working in private social care. A poster with a QR code was also developed for use by branches and BSOF organisers if they are meeting workers/members working for employers outside of the target companies.

This project will be rolled out to all branches in the coming months to maximise the health & safety advice, information and support provided to members and to identify, mobilise and maximise the current H&S activist and officer base.

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

40 activists (53% women) also attended UNISON College NI health & safety modules 1 and 2 training this year. Hundreds of members also attended health and safety in the workplace courses.

The work of the Group was supported by Regional Organiser, Nuala Conlon until her retirement in June 2025. The Group is currently supported by Strategic Regional Organiser, Susan Neill.



UNISON Solidarity Group

Our joint team of lay activists and staff work diligently on UNISON's International Solidarity agenda with particular emphasis on Palestine, Colombia and Cuba.

Our 2025 AGMs elected an increased number of international officers who have participated in our Global Solidarity meetings this year. However, main activity continues to be attendance at marches, demonstrations and lobbies challenging **Genocide in Gaza**.

Committee members also comprise senior activists, TUPF representatives and our joint Convenors and NEC members. We are pleased to announce that Margaret McKee has been elected as Chair of the NEC International Committee.

In addition to our extensive commitment on **Palestine**, our branches and activists have continued to support **Cuba**, particularly with medical supplies. We also represent ICTU on the board of Justice for **Colombia**. This is a critical time for Colombian Solidarity with Presidential elections due to take place in 2026.

We are affiliated to a wide range of other Solidarity campaigns including in **Central and South America**, **Turkey** and **Afghanistan**. The regional Solidarity Group is now including **Sudan** in its list of priorities.

In Manchester in November 2024, we were pleased to participate in the **annual joint regions' seminar** with UNISON Scotland, UNISON North West and UNISON Northern. The 2025 seminar will take place in Belfast on 7th and 8th November and we will also host a Kurdish delegation.

ICTU Global Solidarity: We are represented on the ICTU Global Solidarity Committees North and South by Susan Neill, Conor McCarthy, Mary Ferris and Kevin Hillick.



A large UNISON delegation attended the ICTU **Global Solidarity Summer School** in Newry in August 2025.

The main speaker to a major session on Palestine was Anan Dana, from the Palestinian Teachers Union GUPT. The panel was chaired by UNISON Regional Secretary, Patricia McKeown and included UNISON's Caitlín Ní Chathail, Senator Frances Black, David Landy (Jews for Palestine) and Claire Liddy (GAA Palestine).

The summer school ran over 2 days with expert-led workshops on the following.

- Decent work for platform workers - Darragh Golden (UCD), Tea Jarc (ETUC) and Kruskaya Hidalgo (Solidarity Centre).
- Central Bank Campaign – Helen O'Mahony (IPSC).
- IHRA definition – David Landy.
- Beijing +30 – Dr. Norah Burns (School of Law, QUB and Board member National Women's Council).
- BDS training materials – Caitlín Ní Chathail.
- Community Collaborations to Challenge Racism – David Carroll and Philomena Obasi (Irish Network Against Racism).
- Corporate accountability – Irish Coalition on Business and Human Rights, Chris O'Connell (Trócaire).
- "What is Divestment – the 'D' in BDS?" – Dooley Harte and Jack Ferguson.

Genocide in Gaza: For 2 years, and on a weekly basis, UNISON members and activists across many of our branches have been participating in Solidarity action with the Palestinian people and against Genocide.

UNISON has taken part in major marches and demonstrations centred on Belfast and Dublin, but there has also been strong Solidarity support in many other cities and towns.

A number of our branches have been particularly active holding vigils and demonstrations in support of their counterparts in Gaza and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and protesting against the murder of health workers, education workers, emergency service workers, journalists, aid workers and 60,000 men, women and children.

In this Solidarity campaign we work closely with Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC) and wider Solidarity groups including Mothers Against Genocide and Jews for Palestine Ireland. Our main vehicle is Trade Union Friends of Palestine.

Challenging Genocide: Our actions in challenging Genocide include:

- contributing to the enhanced ICTU policy unanimously agreed at the 2025 Biennial Delegate Conference in Belfast;
- challenging the NI Government on key areas such as Ending Complicity;
- challenging the UK Government in meetings with the Secretary of State on its failure to implement sanctions and an arms embargo;
- making similar challenges to the Irish Government through ICTU; and
- developing a comprehensive training programme on implementing the BDS campaign.

Throughout the past 12 months, on a weekly and sometimes daily basis, we have taken part in marches and demonstrations in Belfast, Derry, Newry and Dublin in partnership with other Solidarity organisations. Our members have taken part in many more local marches, workplace vigils and demonstrations.



Other actions in 2025 have included the following.

- In March, we participated in a continuous picket of the Uni Europa conference in Belfast at which members of the Histadrut were present.
- In May, UNISON member Sue Pentel from Jews for Palestine Ireland was arrested while picketing Barclays Bank.
- In June, UNISON NI activists took part in the 'Global March to Gaza' from Cairo to Rafah in a humanitarian attempt to break the siege.
- Also in June, the Regional Committee motion to NDC was composited with the NEC motion and carried.
- In July, our delegation to the Durham Miners' Gala once again marched behind our 17-year old 'End the War on Gaza' banner.
- In July, the UNISON motion on Genocide; the UNISON Emergency motion; the ICTU Executive Council motion on sanctions; and the Derry Trades Council motion on workers taking action were composited into a comprehensive set of actions unanimously adopted by the conference in an excellent debate opened by Omar Barghouti.
- In August, UNISON RVH and Muckamore branch held its annual hill walk in support of Palestine.
- The Regional Secretary also chaired the Palestine Day discussion at Féile 2025 with Dr. Shahd Hammouri Palestinian /

Jordanian international lawyer and Saleh Hijaz, Palestinian BDS National Committee.

- Also in August the Regional Secretary met with Avi Shlaim, the renowned Israeli historian and author who was launching his latest book, 'Genocide in Gaza.' UNISON purchased a supply of the book for distribution through TUPF.
- In September, UNISON members and other trade unionists took action in workplaces in support of the BDS call - Disrupt Complicity in Genocide. Workers refused to be made complicit by dealing with goods and services from companies complicit in the Genocide. In the education sector and the civil service the protest action centred on HP and Oracle. In the health service it centred on TEVA pharmaceuticals.

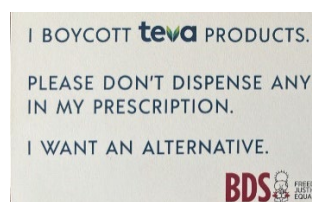
Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS): We work closely with the BDS National Committee and its representatives in Europe. We take our lead from them as they are the voice of Palestinian trade unions and civil society.

UNISON's Caitlín Ní Chathail, in conjunction with Makan and Dooley Harte (UCU) have developed a comprehensive BDS training programme which has now been delivered to over 1000 activists and members and has been incorporated into ICTU and UNISON training programmes.

The programme has also been made available to other UNISON regions and to other Solidarity organisations. It has been showcased at all ICTU events throughout 2024/25 and has had a significant impact on furthering the BDS campaign.



The training programme was originally showcased at the **BDS fringe meeting** for the ICTU Northern Biennial Conference in November 2024. Omar Barghouti, co-founder of the BDS movement, opened the session.



Trade Union Friends of Palestine: The Regional Secretary is the Chair of TUPF in NI. Caitlín Ní Chathail operates as co-ordinator and Susan Neill is Treasurer. TUPF is strongly supported by an increasing number of trade unions and the majority of UNISON branches are affiliated.

TUPF workplace ambassadors: A full cross-union delegation was scheduled to visit Palestine in November 2023. Turkish Airlines cancelled the flight after the events of October, and we are yet to determine when it will be safe for a further delegation visit to take place. We remain in touch with our Palestinian contacts, despite the difficult circumstances.

Branch solidarity: Some of our branches continue to support the **Lajee Centre** in Aida Camp in the Westbank. They have stayed in touch with the Director to understand what support we can give in the face of growing oppression and violence against Palestinians in the OPT.

European Trade Union Network on Palestine (ETUN): Caitlín Ní Chathail continues to be our main link with the ETUN. We are increasingly concerned at the attempts to close down this and other forms of Solidarity Action by a number of countries, rather than them exercising their responsibilities as signatories to the Genocide Convention and other international instruments which require them to take action against Israel instead.



Colombia

Regional Committee continues to encourage branch affiliation to Justice for Colombia (JfC) to ensure that its work can continue to keep an international spotlight on the killings and to push for real action on the Peace Agreement.

The Regional Secretary continues to represent ICTU on the board of JfC. UNISON NI delegates to NDC and ICTU conferences have supported JfC fringes throughout the year and have had the opportunity to welcome its new Director, Victor Figueroa. Victor is no stranger to UNISON NI as he was part of the JfC team in 2012 which organised and supported Patricia McKeown, Pamela Dooley and Brian Campfield for ICTU and the 5 main NI political parties on a Peace Process delegation to Colombia. This began a series of important dialogues.

The extensive videos and materials produced by JfC are available for use by all branches and we are encouraging branch international officers to schedule member participation events in support of trade unions and human rights defenders in Colombia. A number of

activists have been part of fact-finding missions to Colombia and have returned

to encourage support for the Peace Process. We hope to take part in further delegations in November 2025 and in the run up to the Presidential elections in 2026.

Our sister union Fórsa continues to sponsor the JfC Peace Monitor and it is clear that the situation is still highly volatile, despite the historic election of a left-wing President Gustavo Petro. President Petro can only serve one term under the Colombian Constitution, and the next election is already being bitterly fought. There have been many important reforms under Petro's leadership, but those opposed to the Peace Process still hold considerable power. Despite reforms, the assassination of trade unionists and human rights activists continues.

The majority of our branches have now affiliated to JfC.



Cuba

Branches are encouraged to affiliate to the Cuba Solidarity campaign.

Direct support: Regional Committee commends the work of branches and activists who contributed resources and time to the appeal for medical supplies. These shipments were coordinated through local solidarity groups and UNISON sent a full container to Cuban hospitals. Cuban health workers expressed their gratitude, and the Cuba Ambassador to Ireland has invited UNISON reps to attend an event in the Cuban Embassy to thank them for their efforts. We also thank those medics and others in Trusts who have supported the initiative.

In October 2024 the UN General Assembly renewed its long-standing call for an end to the US economic and trade embargo against Cuba. This is the 31st time this annual



Resolution has been carried despite the US attempts to convince its allies not to support it. Only 2 countries voted against – USA and Israel. We are supporting the Solidarity Group

established with the Cuban Embassy in Ireland to mount a legal challenge to end the blockade. In July 2024, we supported the ICTU call condemning the inclusion of Cuba on the US list of state sponsored terrorism without any evidence to justify this.

We continue to promote the ICTU motions calling for the immediate ending of the illegal blockade of Cuba.

SERVICE GROUPS

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

Regional Committee has encouraged stronger co-operation between the service groups, self-organised groups and special interest groups to ensure that equality issues, in particular, are a central focus of UNISON bargaining in all sectors.

The work of the service groups and related lay structures is reported in detail in Section Two.

There are 56 members of the **Health Service Group**. Its current composition is 66% women, up from 63% last year. The group has met 4 times in formal session during 2025 with further briefing sessions taking place throughout the year.

There are 22 members of the **Education and Local Government Service Group**. Its composition currently stands at 73% women, down from 76% last year. The group met 3 times in formal sessions during 2025 with further briefing sessions taking place throughout the year.

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 14: Representation on UNISON national structures – 2023/24

UNISON national structures	NI Representatives
NEC	Alastair Long, Margaret McKee and Catherine McKenna
Local Govt Service Group Executive	Anne Taggart and Melanie Wright
Health Service Group Executive	Maura McKenna, Jill Weir and Deborah Yapicioz
Health Sector Committees	Ambulance – Alastair Long Nursing & Midwifery – Sarah Breen and Alan Philson Operational Services – Roisin Keenan and Martin Philson Science & Technical – Stephen McNeill
Schools Committee	Anne Taggart
Higher Education	Vacant as a result of privatisation
Women's Committee	Helen Crickard and Anne Taggart
Disability Committee	Amanda Rutherford and Amanda Sweetlove
LGBT+	Alexis Dickson
Young Members Forum	Aodhan Gregory
Health and Safety	Carmen Biagioni
National Black Members Committee	Patrick Yu
National Retired Members	Martin Gallagher
Community	Vacant



Developing membership services

THERE FOR YOU – WELFARE SERVICES

UNISON NI Welfare Group: The Group has 16 members (81% women) with 15 branches participating. Fifteen branch welfare officers were elected following this year's AGMs with 6 completely new to the post. The Group's own AGM is scheduled to take place before the end of the year. The Group continues to encourage more branch welfare officers to attend meetings to share information and good practice.

Branch welfare officer training is now delivered online and three Group members are trained mentors and available to support those newly elected to a welfare post.

Welfare at Work week takes place in late September/early October every year to promote and celebrate the There for You service. The service offers financial grants, debt advice, budgeting tools, and benefits checkers to UNISON members facing difficult times.



The week involves UNISON branches organising activities to raise awareness of the support available, ensuring members know they are not alone and can access help when needed.

Branch donations: NI branches continue to make regular donations to There for You and

over 50% are signed up to the There for You lottery.



Financial assistance and grants received:

During 2024, a union-wide total £857,193 was paid out in financial assistance. Of this total, members in NI received £100,827.

There was also a high volume of applications for the winter fuel grant, energy support fund and school uniform grant. A total of £17,115.83 was paid to UNISON NI members in the first 6 months of 2025.

Regional advice service: Many members are referred by branches to Agnes Fraser at Tar Isteach for benefit advice and support. This much-needed service is provided by Agnes on a voluntary basis and has been a lifeline for many low paid members especially those finding themselves in ill health.

It has saved UNISON members from all branches many hundreds of thousands of pounds by assisting and supporting them to apply for the benefits they need.

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

UNISON LIVING FINANCIAL SERVICES

Quilter Financial Advisers maintained a physical presence in support of our branches and hosted 6 Seminars during the year with 185 attendees. This resulted in 12 members requesting personal appointments. They also hosted 1 surgery which had a further 7 attendees.



Abbey Autoline continued to offer support to our branches throughout 2025. They attended several branch AGM meetings, met branches in the regional office and spoke at a pre-retirement seminar.

UNISON Protect (formerly UIB) launched a free £5000 death policy in January 2025 and reported a high take up rate. They have provided NI branches with materials and information for AGM's and recruitment events. They also met with delegates at UNISON NDC and have responded to all requests sent digitally.



LEGAL SERVICES

The following is an update report from our solicitors Thompsons NI to the end of August 2025 on cases and activity.



UNISON Personal Injury Cases - Sept 2024 to Aug 2025

UNISON members and their families have access to a comprehensive legal service through Thompsons NI Solicitors.

This includes expert representation in personal injury claims—whether sustained at work, on the road, or abroad—as well as in cases involving serious injuries such as brain and spinal trauma, amputations, and burns.

Members affected by industrial diseases, including asbestos-related conditions like mesothelioma and asbestosis, are supported by specialists with a proven track record of securing substantial compensation.

Clinical negligence claims are also covered, with free initial advice available to both members and their families.

Table 15 - UNISON Personal Injury Cases from Sept 2024 to Aug 2025

	2023-2024	2024-2025
Cases received	200	209
Cases closed	181	187
Cases won	93	107
Cases lost	0	1
Cases discontinued/turned down	52	50
Cases where no contact from client	36	29
Turnaround time average	18 months	19 months
Damages	£1,952,563	£1,444,726
Average Damages	£20,995	£13,502

Notable outcomes include:

- **£30,000 for a homecare worker** for a stress claim arising from mismanagement of an allegation made against the member.
- **£200,000 for a staff nurse** who sustained a serious dislocation to their right shoulder after tripping over an electric cable.
- **£27,500 for a classroom assistant** following a clinical negligence claim for injuries to their right shoulder and arm after receiving a COVID-19 vaccination.
- **£16,250 for a UNISON family member** who sustained facial injuries after falling from a defective bicycle, following a successful claim against Halfords.
- **£50,000 for a healthcare worker** who sustained a soft tissue injury and permanent scarring when multiple trolleys fell onto their left leg.
- **£25,000 for a staff nurse** who suffered a back injury while attempting to stop an elderly patient from falling.
- **£65,000 for a social worker** assaulted on two separate occasions, sustaining physical and psychological injuries.
- **£7,500 for a retired healthcare worker** who sustained a cut to their left leg while shopping in Marks & Spencer.

- **£75,000 for a support worker** in the voluntary sector who suffered multiple physical injuries and psychiatric harm following a serious assault.
- **£5,000 for a homecare worker** who sustained a dog bite while attending a service user's home.

There was a notable decline in needlestick settlements. However, over £23,000 in compensation was paid out to members across these claims.



Employment rights

Advice and Representation for Members:

Thompsons NI Solicitors supports UNISON officials through a dedicated Advice Line, enabling them to assist members with workplace issues and identify cases where legal intervention may be necessary.

This early engagement ensures members receive timely, practical guidance and that potential claims are escalated for full legal assessment when appropriate.

Where further action is needed, officials can refer cases to Thompsons for direct advice to members. In more complex matters, we provide full representation at Tribunal.

Throughout the process, they work closely with UNISON to secure the best possible outcomes for members—whether through industrial solutions or legal remedies.

Drawing on specialist expertise, Thompsons Solicitors NI has supported UNISON members in situations including the following.

- **Disability Discrimination and Reasonable Adjustments:** Members with conditions such as ADHD, fibromyalgia, and PTSD sought advice where employers failed to implement Occupational Health recommendations or refused flexible working arrangements.
- **Race Discrimination:** Allegations of less favourable treatment, including exclusion from meetings, allocation of undesirable shifts, and racially offensive comments,

with referrals under the Race Discrimination Protocol.

- **Unfair Dismissal:** Dismissals for alleged misconduct or capability, including cases where procedural fairness was questioned (e.g., inadequate investigation, denial of representation).
- **Redundancy and TUPE:** Disputes over selection criteria, consultation processes, and entitlement to redundancy pay following restructuring or service provision changes.
- **Unlawful Deduction of Wages:** Claims for unpaid holiday pay, overtime, and deductions for training costs without contractual authority.
- **Flexible Working and Family Rights:** Refusals of flexible working requests linked to childcare or disability, with advice on potential indirect discrimination.
- **Whistleblowing:** Members alleging detriment or dismissal after raising health and safety or safeguarding concerns.
- **Trade Union Activities:** Cases involving detriment for union representation duties, including denial of facility time and exclusion from consultation.

The team also advises on Compromise Agreements to ensure members receive the best possible advice on the terms and effect of these agreements, protecting their rights and interests.

Free Wills Service and Enduring Powers of Attorney: Members can avail of our Free Wills Service, giving peace of mind that their affairs are in order. The team also offers preferential rates for Enduring Powers of Attorney, helping members plan ahead and protect their interests.

Criminal Law Support: Through UNISON's discretionary criminal support service, Thompsons NI provides specialist advice and representation in cases involving work-related criminal allegations. Our team regularly assists members who may be coming into contact with the criminal justice system for the first time.

Support can range from advice at the police station through to full representation in the courts. Typical issues include allegations arising from the workplace such as assault, ill-treatment, theft, fraud, or safeguarding concerns.

General Legal Advice: Members are entitled to free initial legal advice on a wide range of non-work-related matters, including the following.

- Family law
- Debt and consumer issues
- Road traffic offences
- Housing and landlord disputes
- Property and conveyancing matters

Training and Events: Thompsons NI is more than just a legal service provider we work in partnership with UNISON to support and empower members. This year, our solicitors have delivered training on the following.

- Health and Safety
- How to best support members through a personal injury claim
- What evidence is needed for a strong personal injury case
- Planning for the future: why every member should have a will

The team has also attended AGMs, working alongside UNISON to promote the full range of valuable legal services available to members.



THOMPSONS
SOLICITORS



UNISON
the public service union

STANDING UP FOR YOU

On your side whenever you need us

UNISON Legal Services are provided by Thompsons Solicitors. With more experience of winning personal injury claims than any other firm, Thompsons provides FREE legal advice to UNISON members.

The legal surgery covers all types of personal injury:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Accidents at or outside of work ■ Road traffic accidents ■ Industrial deafness ■ Repetitive strain injury 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Industrial and asbestos-related diseases ■ Slips, trips and falls ■ Vibration white finger
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OBJECTIVE 2:

BARGAINING & BARGAINING FOR EQUALITY



OUR BARGAINING AND EQUALITY PRIORITIES

Over the last 12 months, UNISON NI has continued to develop and strengthen the link between organising members, bargaining and negotiating on the priority issues that affect them, and campaigning for the development of important public policies to improve their lives and the lives of their families.

Consequently, much of the work reported here involves the lay bargaining teams, but also direct input from regional lead bargainers, the regional management team, the regional policy team, our organising initiatives and direct support from UNISON College NI.

The return of the Executive and Assembly in February 2024 was followed by successful resolution of industrial action undertaken by our members in its absence. However, the persistent funding shortfalls facing public services in NI continue to provide a difficult context for our efforts to improve pay and conditions. We will continue to challenge political leaders at Stormont to deliver on their responsibilities to workers, focusing on improving pay and terms and conditions, whilst tackling staffing shortages.

Challenging inequality, low pay and poverty; seeking enhanced workers' rights; tackling discrimination and rising racism; and pushing back against retrograde immigration reforms remain issues for the bargaining agenda and our policy engagement with Government.

For workers across private sector social care, our campaign continues to seek that any uplifts on funding are translated into better pay, terms and conditions. This work aligns with the UNISON Organising to Win projects in private sector social care and non-EA schools.

Our **regional multi-union bargaining teams** in health and education continue to be led by UNISON as lead secretaries and joint secretaries. The UNISON negotiating teams are a combination of UNISON staff and senior lay bargainers, working collectively to advance the position of our members.

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



UNISON members and reps gave **evidence to the Low Pay Commission** in July 2025, outlining the difficulties faced by the lowest paid. The Commission will make its recommendations to the UK Government in October.

Work on **maintaining our equality, consultation and negotiating rights** is undertaken by bargaining teams, our policy team and the RMT. As can be seen throughout the report, we are pursuing key issues on equality at both the bargaining table and directly with Government, such as seeking the introduction of progressive legislation on employment rights. Our bargainers continue to push ahead across key equality issues.

Further to the ruling reached by the Supreme Court on **Holiday pay and underpayment of wages**, UNISON, assisted by solicitors, Lewis Silkin, has lodged claims with the Industrial Tribunal on behalf of thousands of UNISON members for incorrect payment of holiday pay. This followed on from members being invited to complete surveys to identify if they had been paid their holiday pay incorrectly.

Claims have been lodged with the Tribunal against multiple employers across the health, education, private sector and community & voluntary sectors. Settlement awards amounting to thousands of pounds have been reached with numerous employers. Negotiations are continuing with other employers to settle claims.

BARGAINING IN HEALTH

AfC Pay campaign 2024/25: UNISON has continued to lead the way across health unions in pressing for Agenda for Change pay uplifts in NI.

Following the announcement of the Pay Review Body (PRB) recommendations for 2024/25 in July 2024, UNISON pursued their full implementation in NI against the context of a funding crisis across health and social care.

In December 2024 we secured a commitment in relation to AfC pay in NI for 2024/25 to maintain pay parity with England, but with payment in two phases, reflecting the financial constraints on the health budget.

The first phase of payment was to cover 10 months, back to 1st June 2024. The Department of Health had formally acknowledged that this was only a partial 10-month payment and made a commitment to ensure payment of the remaining 2 months once the necessary funding was secured.

In January 2025, the Department received additional funding and committed to backdate payment to 1st May 2024. In February 2025, confirmation was received from the Health Minister that he had approved payment of the full 12 months of the AfC pay award from 1st April 2024, with the workforce receiving the pay uplift and associated back pay in their March 2025 pay packets.

This outcome was delivered as a result of sustained pressure and campaigning by members and branches, led by our NI Health Services Group. A significant concern that remains following the 2024/25 resolution was that it took much longer to reach in NI than in England, Wales and Scotland, due to the financial pressures affecting the health service and wider public services in NI.

AfC Pay Campaign 2025/26: Following the PRB recommendations in May, the Health Minister stated that he had begun a process to secure the funding required to implement the 3.6%

pay uplift by issuing a Ministerial direction that the pay uplift be approved without delay.

The Minister was issuing this direction because there is a significant shortfall in the health budget in NI this year (over £600M, including the cost of implementing the recommended PRB pay uplift).



As lead joint secretary for health trade unions, UNISON arranged a meeting with the Minister in June to discuss the issue of pay and the actions he had taken to secure funding for a pay uplift. At the meeting, the Minister informed us that the direction he had issued had moved to the whole NI Executive for their consideration, but that the Executive had not yet agreed to support the funding required.

It was made clear to the Minister that delays in securing funding for a pay uplift are unacceptable to our members, particularly considering that it took until March 2025 for the 2024/25 pay uplift to be put in place.

Following NHS workers in England receiving the recommended 3.6% pay uplift in August, we have made clear that the link to **pay parity** has now been broken, with workers without any clarity as to when a pay uplift will be in place in NI. This is despite repeated commitments by the Health Minister and Executive to maintain pay parity with England. Health and social care workers are entitled, as a bare minimum, to pay parity with their colleagues.

If the Health Minister and the wider Executive do not move to put the issue of pay right, industrial relations will worsen considerably. We have highlighted that previous industrial action was taken in order to secure and defend the principle of pay parity and that our members will not accept broken promises on pay.



Discussions with the Minister and Department on pay have included discussions on how any pay uplift would be applied for workers on AfC band 2 who, since April, are on the minimum wage of £12.21. UNISON will continue to make the case that the Real Living Wage should be the minimum rate applied.

Removing exorbitant spend on agency use: The pay dispute in 2019, besides achieving the reinstatement of pay parity, also secured a framework agreement on tackling safe staffing and curbing the accelerating spend on agency staff. UNISON has continued to lead joint union interventions on these two major issues over the last 12 months. UNISON sits on a project oversight board on agency spend that has been established by the Department of Health.

Significant progress has been achieved in reducing reliance on off-contract agency. Our focus remains on addressing vacancies to reduce reliance on contract agency workers. Our regional lay bargaining teams throughout the Trusts continue to focus on this task.

We are currently negotiating across a range of workstreams to achieve several objectives, including continuity of pay frequency across the nurse bank through weekly pay; seeking an

enhanced rate of pay in the nurse bank; and to end the casualisation of the nursing workforce. We are acutely aware of the need to protect the integrity of the AfC framework and that any reforms improve the working arrangements for our members working in the statutory sector under AfC terms and conditions.

The procurement frameworks for the use of agency nursing have been extended for a further 2 years, until May 2027. Our focus will continue to be on ensuring that any savings to the HSC system made as a result of this work can be redirected towards the non-agency workforce, such as through greater incentivisation of the use of the nurse bank.

NI Ambulance Service (NIAS): Over the last year, UNISON NIAS Branch negotiators were successful in maintaining the end of shift protocol for all our members. This ensured that UNISON members continue to have protections for the last hour of every shift when they are only dispatched to appropriately triaged calls that meet the definition of 'life and limb' cover.



In June, NIAS branch representatives met alongside other unions representing ambulance staff with the Health Minister, NIAS and Department of Health officials. UNISON highlighted the need to address the root causes of delayed patient handovers, which lead to unacceptably long waiting periods for patients and ambulance crews outside hospitals. UNISON is clear that action to address these problems must be taken not just by NIAS but across the entire HSC system.

As part of our ongoing **Agenda for Change (AfC), Pay Max/Refresh strategy**, UNISON negotiators have achieved further bargaining successes, building upon success in previous years, for our members.



In the **Northern HSC Trust**, we continue to have huge success in achieving pay uplifts across a range of posts including admin workers in neurology. Dementia champions achieved an upgrade from band 2 to band 3, child health assistants from band 3 to band 4 and electricians and joiners from band 4 to band 5. Northern branch has recently launched a Pay Fair for Patient Care campaign, seeking to upgrade Health Care Assistants.

In the **Belfast HSC Trust** we had success in achieving higher paid banding for around 500 homecare workers moving from band 2 to band 3. Successes were also achieved for support services supervisors and staff working in admin roles. Job descriptions have been submitted for re-banding for other admin and clerical staff, support service managers and healthcare assistants.



In the **South Eastern HSC Trust**, just over 40 staff working in admin roles such as medical secretaries were successful in an uplift from band 2 to band 3. Other successes include support workers at Cedar Court residential unit moving from band 2 to band 3. Work is continuing on re-evaluating patient experience posts and admin posts across the Trust.

In the **Western HSC Trust** success was achieved in bringing security staff back in-house and paid at the appropriate banding for their role. Foyle branch has recently launched a Pay Fair for Patient Care campaign, seeking to upgrade health care assistants. Work is continuing to review the grading of jobs across a range of posts in the Trust. Success was also achieved to end 'clocking in and out' for all support services staff.



In the **Southern HSC Trust**, our 3 branches have continued with success in AfC grading uplifts for members. Electricians and plumbers have moved from band 4 to band 5. Early pregnancy nurses have moved from band 5 to band 6. There has also been upward movement for admin staff in St. Lukes and across the Trust. Further job descriptions have been submitted for regrading for other posts including mental health and learning disability support workers; day centre managers and community admin posts; and occupational therapists. Ongoing successes also include moving temporary support staff to permanent posts.

Engagement with nursing sector structures:

We maintain our regional representation on the Central Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Committee and the NI Professional Education Council. A commitment was secured from DoH as part of the 2023 pay settlement to discuss expanding movement of nurse posts through the banding system. We are seeking to progress this work through our regional bargaining structures and will be seeking to build participation in our Nurses Forum alongside this.

Safe staffing legislation: We continue to work alongside other health trade unions to progress the development of safe staffing legislation, further to the commitments made by the Minister for Health in the 2020 Framework Agreement that led to the suspension of our industrial action on pay parity and safe staffing issues. In October 2024, UNISON made a comprehensive response to a public consultation on proposals for the legislation.

The most recent update from the Department of Health has suggested that a draft Bill is likely to be introduced to the Assembly in early 2026. We will continue to seek swift progress so that effective, robust legislation can be in place without delay, particularly as the Assembly mandate is due to end by spring 2027.

As part of the UNISON 'Only Enough is Enough' campaign, across November 2024 UNISON members working across health and social care in NI were asked to complete a survey that provided them with the opportunity to anonymously report on staffing levels after every shift. This survey highlights once again the significant staffing issues affecting patients, service users and UNISON members in NI.

In total, surveys were completed for 771 different shifts, with around 55% of the shifts having been completed in a hospital. Amongst clinical staff, 67% answered 'no' when asked were there enough staff to deliver safe patient care on the shift they had just completed. Concerningly, 42% did not then escalate a safety or staffing concern according to their organisation's policy. 60% reported that they

did not have confidence their employer would act on their concerns. 29% reporting that they did not have time. 29% reporting being fearful of the consequences of doing so. 19% saying that they did not know how to.



The survey results suggest a widespread view amongst the health and social care workforce in NI that there are not enough staff in place to deliver safe care. There is a worrying lack of confidence that meaningful action is being taken to address this by employers and decision-makers.

This feedback from our members will be crucial in our campaigning to improve staffing levels, including through the introduction of safe staffing legislation.

Mileage subsidy issues: Following the mobilisation of the workforce at employer and community level, we managed to secure an enhanced subsidy for directly employed NHS staff. The issue of mileage subsidies continues to be on the agenda at NHS Staff Council.

Fair Work Forum and social care: As we reported last year, the Fair Work Forum for social care recommenced its work following UNISON interventions. The Forum includes representatives of employers, Government Departments, trade unions and other statutory agencies and stakeholders and is convened by the Minister of Health. UNISON is represented on the Forum alongside the GMB and RCN.

UNISON sought the establishment of the Forum and has been seeking that it progresses initiatives to improve pay and terms and conditions across non-statutory social care services, alongside our efforts outlined above to improve pay and conditions for the directly employed AfC workforce.

Over the last 12 months, we contributed significantly to a major workforce survey undertaken by the Forum of the registered social care workforce employed across the private sector and community and voluntary sector. The survey generated around 1300 responses and provided important information from across the registered social care workforce on issues of pay, mileage and travel, terms and conditions and the impact of the cost of living crisis.

In January 2025, the Health Minister publicly committed to invest in ensuring that social care workers receive the real Living Wage in NI. However, whilst it was initially indicated that this investment would be made in September 2025, the Department of Health has indicated that difficulties remain in securing the funding required for it to be applied.

In addition, we have highlighted our concerns regarding the intention to apply this uplift for registered care workers, rather than the entirety of the workforce. We are seeking further assurances as to how the use of any additional funding for employers to uplift pay to the real Living Wage rates will be monitored.



Other examples of bargaining successes in social care: Joint negotiation forums continue for Beaumont, Healthcare Ireland, Strabane District Caring, and Ann's Home Care. Recent issues resolved include pay, e-learning, and holiday entitlements. Plans are being developed to challenge other employers who are not responding to requests to meet.



- Stewards continue to meet regularly in Beaumont, with staffing being a key focus. Stewards designed a survey and shared it with members to gather feedback. As a result, additional staff have been added to rotas in several nursing homes.
- In Kathryn's Nursing Homes, members successfully secured an additional £1.00 per hour uplift for working Sundays in two of the homes.
- In North West Care (Omagh), members were successful with their grievance in achieving the same pay and travel benefits as colleagues working in other areas.
- In M Care, members raised concerns about late pension contributions, with some records showing no payments for several months. Following pressure on the employer and support from the Belfast Trust and South Eastern Trust, all outstanding contributions have now been rectified.
- In Kilmore Care, members were balloted on their pay award, with over 70% of members who returned their ballot voting in favour. The company agreed to pay the Home Office-required uplift effective from 1st April.
- In Strabane District Caring, all care staff now receive the real Living Wage. Negotiations are ongoing to extend the real Living Wage to all staff across the organisation.

BARGAINING IN EDUCATION

As a result of the 2025 budget allocation from the NI Executive, the Education Authority (EA) has reported operating with a deficit of over £300m. This has led to restrictions in recruiting staff and delay in much-needed reform across the education sector. We secured agreement from the EA that the restrictions on recruitment will not apply to frontline support service posts and classroom assistant posts.

Despite the funding challenges, our bargaining teams have continued working to protect and secure employment rights and health & safety standards for our support services members working in classroom assistant, school transport, cleaning, catering, estates and youth service roles. Our lay team participates directly in all the EA bargaining directorates - operational services (estates, catering, cleaning, transport), children & young people's services, education (curriculum and services), finance and HR. Key bargaining issues include:

- development of a new drivers' manual;
- review of retainer fee;
- essential car users allowance;
- restructures in Grounds Maintenance and the Education Welfare Service;
- implementation of Special Educational Needs reform – Local Impact Teams (LITS);
- the need for a framework recognition agreement with Voluntary Grammar schools and the ever-growing integrated sector (all individual employers);
- new flexi-time and TOIL policies;
- resources for EA youth services; and
- implementation of the Brazil and Agnew judgements on the calculation of annual leave for term time workers and payment of holiday pay respectively.

The **Pay & Grading agreement** for members across EA education support services was implemented in two stages.

- Stage 1 moved eligible staff onto their new pay scales with effect from 1st April 2024. This stage of the agreement was implemented for the majority of support staff in November/December 2024.
- Stage 2, implemented in April 2025 consisted of a non-consolidated payment

of £2,550 (pro-rata according to actual hours worked during the 2023-24 financial year) to those staff who were in post on 1st April 2024.



Pay & Grading for Catering Staff: In spring of this year negotiations with the EA concluded on the restructure and review of jobs within catering services. New posts and job descriptions were agreed with staff given the opportunity to move to higher paid posts. UNISON branches and reps supported members throughout this process.

Earlier this year, UNISON received information from the EA that out of 21,815 **classroom assistant** posts, 14,930 (68%) are temporary. Of those workers on temporary contracts, 2,727 have been employed by the EA in the same post for more than 4 years.

We have made it clear to the EA that this unacceptable situation needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency by both it and the Department of Education. Classroom assistants and the wider education support services workforce should not be in precarious employment with the associated risks of financial insecurity. UNISON engaged in social media and press activity to highlight the extent of these issues and to call for significant change.

Work has begun with the EA on urgently addressing the numbers of staff on temporary contracts. Further to this, work has also commenced on the development of a new classroom assistant employment model. Workstreams have been established which will involve addressing low pay levels and the various types of contracts of employment such as 'term-time' and 'blended contracts'; recruitment and retention; classroom assistant

qualifications; and career pathways. UNISON College stepped in to fill the gap left by the EA and has provided training to enable our first wave of classroom assistants to gain the necessary qualifications.

Further to these issues, through our Local Government Service Group we have held meetings with classroom assistant members, activists and branches. We will continue this engagement over the coming months to develop the UNISON negotiating and campaigning strategy to support this group of members. We are developing a public campaign to engage our members, parents, and the wider public on the issues and align with our efforts in direct negotiations with the EA and Department of Education.

Negotiations are concluding with the EA on finalising the details of staff working in **Extended Schools** moving to NJC pay rates and EA terms and conditions.

Following the allocation of resources from the Branch Support and Organising Fund to support recruitment and organising in this sector, significant progress continues to be made in securing better outcomes for our members across **Integrated and Voluntary Grammar Schools**.

In addition to the growth in recruitment of members and identification of new stewards outlined elsewhere in this report, recognition agreements with five schools have been secured, with Joint Negotiating Forums established. Several other schools are currently considering entering into voluntary recognition agreements with UNISON. This has led to direct negotiation and bargaining activity with the schools aimed at securing improvements in terms and conditions for the workforce.

Our overarching goal remains to secure a regional negotiating forum for members across integrated and voluntary grammar schools on their pay, terms and conditions. This will require direct engagement with the Education Minister and the Department of Education and we are currently planning our next steps in this campaign.

NJC pay 2025: The NJC employers' side (England, Wales and NI) 2025 pay offer was a 3.2% pay increase across all pay points, backdated to 1st April. The UNISON NJC Committee of the Local Government Service Group Executive decided to advise members to reject the offer as part of a consultation in May and June. We worked with UNISON Centre to develop consultation materials for members in NI to highlight the effect of the offer on the pay scales that apply for education support services staff employed by the EA following the Pay and Grading Review.



Whilst UNISON's consultation on the 2025 pay offer resulted in members voting to reject the offer, turnout in the consultation gave very little prospect of UNISON being able to conduct a successful industrial action ballot in England and Wales. A further approach from the three NJC unions to the employers, urging them to improve the offer, was unsuccessful.

Therefore, the NJC Committee sought a settlement of the pay round so that members could receive the pay uplift as soon as possible. The GMB subsequently adopted a similar position, and on that basis the NJC Trade Union Side agreed to inform the employers that UNISON wished to settle the 2025 pay round. Funding to implement the pay settlement was secured to implement the 3.2% pay increase on all pay points. In September, EA employed staff received their pay uplift and backdated pay to 1st April.

UNISON's NJC Committee is currently in the process of developing a timely 2026 pay claim.

BARGAINING IN FURTHER & HIGHER EDUCATION AND LIBRARIES

We are engaged in collective bargaining across many other employers on behalf of our members. The following is a selection of bargaining outcomes and issues over the year and is not an exhaustive list. Reports on this bargaining are presented in more detail to the relevant lay structure committees.

Further education - Regional Colleges: The 2024/5 pay award was agreed in December 2024 and backdated to 1st April 2024. The pay award included:

- an increase of £1,290 (pro rata for part-time employees) to be paid as a consolidated, permanent addition on all NJC pay points 2 to 43 inclusive;
- an increase of 2.5% on all pay points above the maximum of the pay spine but graded below deputy chief officer; and
- an increase of 2.5% on all allowances

Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC) took the decision to opt out of the negotiating structures with trade unions - the Colleges Employers Forum (CEF) and the Non-teaching staff Negotiating Committee (NTSNC).

The Department for the Economy decided to commission a review of the collaborative working arrangements. UNISON contributed to the consultation along with joint trade union side.



The options identified for a new collaborative working approach between the Colleges and trade unions are:

- to set up separate body / agency to support FE Sector; and
- wider FE delivery model legislative change.



In the interim, the Economy Minister requested an independent convenor to be appointed to oversee the development, implementation and operation of the new bargaining arrangements. UNISON have continued to engage FE representatives to push for meetings to be re-established. In early September the first meeting of the NTSNC was reconvened to look at re-establishing the structure and updating the constitution.

At a local level, UNISON has been successful in securing the transfer of over 60 staff from the private providers **Graham FM** and **Mount Charles** back in-house to the Northern Regional College and North West Regional College. The TUPE process for all affected staff is expected to be completed by February 2026.

Higher education - Universities: Over the summer months UNISON consulted with members on a 2025/26 pay claim. This claim included an increase on all pay points of at least RPI (as of August 2025) + 3.5%, or a flat rate increase on each spine point of at least £2,500 (whichever is greater). In addition, the claim also included:

- equivalent percentage rises to London Weighting and any other allowances;
- a new minimum pay rate of £15 an hour;

- all institutions to become Foundation Living Wage employers and for all pay points below the FLW to be deleted;
- a commitment to an urgent and comprehensive reform of the New JNCES pay spine.

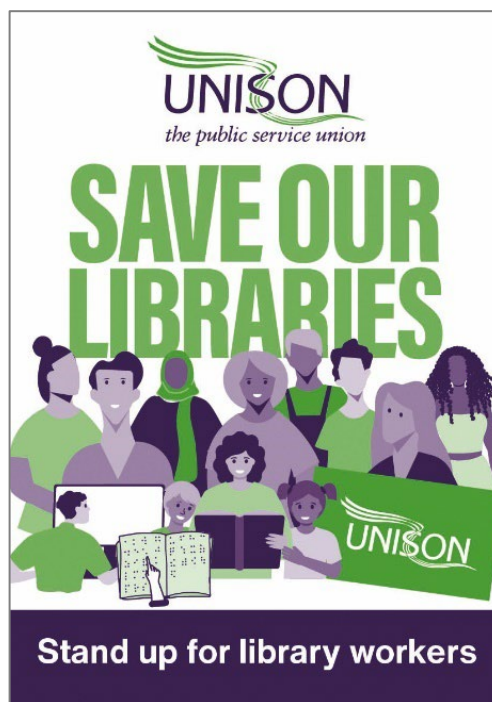
The employer's body UCEA made a full and final offer of a 1.4% increase on all pay points, along with proposals to delete points 5 and 6 of the pay scale.

UNISON members have rejected the employers offer and are currently being balloted for strike action.

Libraries NI: The NJC 2024/5 pay award for Libraries NI employees was agreed in December 2024. The award included:

- an increase of £1,290 on NJC salary scale points 2 to 43 (pro rata for part-time employees), backdated to 1st April 2024;
- an increase of 2.5% on NJC salary scale points 44 and above (pro rata for part-time employees), backdated to 1st April 2024.

Work continues with Libraries NI on a review of frontline services, to include the updating of job descriptions and creating career progression pathways. Negotiations are also continuing around implementation of a job evaluation scheme.



OTHER SECTORAL BARGAINING

Negotiations are ongoing with **Mid & East Antrim Council** on the restructuring of corporate services and the support directorate. Our work also continues with the Council on commencing a review of the job evaluation model. We are awaiting proposals from council on a revised job evaluation scheme.

Arjo UK staff were awarded a pay increase of 2.5% for 2025. Work is ongoing to extend the health benefits provided to Arjo workers in GB and the Republic of Ireland to workers in NI.

Following negotiations with **Camphill Community Glencraig** a pay award, which equated to an increase of £1400 - £1700 per annum for 2025/26, was accepted by UNISON members. A review of the grievance and the conflict, bullying and harassment policies was completed. We were also successful in extending recognition to cover teaching staff at Camphill.



Community & Voluntary sector: Our members working across hundreds of organisations in the community and voluntary sector provide essential services in communities throughout NI that supplement health and social services, housing services and many other services provided by the public sector. Yet many organisations in the sector have lost vital core funding with services and workers providing those services affected. We have prioritised the need for sustainable funding for

the sector in our engagement with the NI Executive.

With the funding challenges, we continue to work for better pay and improved terms and conditions of employment for our members.

Further to achieving recognition with the **Law Society NI**, a pay offer of 3.5% for 2025 was accepted by UNISON members. The pay settlement also included the standardisation of the employer pension contribution rate increasing from 5% to 10% for all workers who were previously subject to the 5% contribution rate. In the coming year, work is to commence on a review of organisational structures.

This year saw the completion of a job evaluation exercise at **Apex Housing**. Over 100 posts across support staff and direct labour staff were evaluated. Upgrades were achieved for kitchen assistants, housekeepers, laundry assistants and across the range of support worker roles. Job evaluation appeals were concluded with some posts being upgraded.

Apex Housing also accepted and implemented the 2024 NJC pay award of £1,290 per annum on each point. Our work continues on seeking to improve pay rates for working over holiday periods and reducing agency spend.

Following negotiations, staff in **Simon Community NI** received a lump sum payment of £500 and a pay award of 3% on all pay scales. In addition, the employer pension contribution rate increased from 3.5% to 4.5% for all staff. A settlement of 'Agnew' holiday pay claims was also reached with staff receiving backdated pay over several years.

At **De Paul Ireland** the lowest paid staff received a pay award of 6.5% while those on higher paid grades received a 5% increase.

Newington Housing Association implemented the 2025 NJC pay award of 3.2% increase on all pay points with employees receiving their pay uplift and backdated pay in August.



OBJECTIVE 3:

CAMPAIGNING, PUBLIC POLICY AND SUPPORTING THE PEACE PROCESS



WHY CAMPAIGN?

As a union, everything we do is about creating a better life for our members. Because of our direct involvement with our membership, we are acutely aware of the issues which are important to them and the future. During the current cost of living crisis facing our members, effective campaigning has never been more important.

Regional Committee is aware that much of our detailed work at the negotiating table, and in political lobbying, can seem remote from the everyday issues which affect our members' lives.

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

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

CURRENT POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXT



In last year's report we noted our determination that the restored devolved Government at Stormont should deliver for our members, their families and communities. The past year of activity from the NI Assembly and Executive, however, has not been inspiring.

The legislative agenda has been unambitious. We are all hopeful about what could be delivered through the Good Jobs Bill but progress has been slow leaving the Bill pressed for time to get it through the Assembly before the next election.

The long wait for social inclusion strategies to be developed by the Department for Communities remains frustrating with no sign of disability, gender equality or LGBT+ strategies.

June 2025 saw the publication of a draft Anti-Poverty Strategy, a strategy that the Executive is legally obligated to produce. This followed a 2nd legal challenge in March 2025 by CAJ, supported by us.

Unfortunately, despite years of comprehensive submissions and an excellent draft strategy, which we were party to, the content is disappointing.

UNISON has joined calls from ICTU, the wider trade union movement and our allies in the Equality Coalition, for the Executive to reject this version as not fit for purpose.

Financially, the 2025/26 budget consultation revealed an ongoing shortfall across all Executive Departments with cuts or flat allocations that will not meet the growing challenges of delivering public services. The Executive also remains far behind its target for building social housing; health service improvement and transformation remains behind schedule; and key proposals that could address poverty, such as introducing universal free school meals for all children, have been rejected due to financial constraints.

As a new term of the Assembly gets underway, there is a strong feeling across civil society that the status quo in politics and public policy cannot be allowed to continue without a more robust challenge.

We look ahead to a year that will see an increase in grassroots organising and mobilisation to build a society based on accountability, rights and equality, where the outstanding commitments within our Peace Agreements can be delivered.



The impact of exiting the EU

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

UNISON is clear that rights must not only be protected as they stand, but must also develop over time in line with progressive changes at the EU level. Within the **Protocol on Ireland/Ni/Windsor Framework**, the UK committed to the non-diminution of some rights contained within the Good Friday Agreement as a result of exiting the EU. The Protocol further provides for the establishment of a 'Dedicated Mechanism' comprised of the NI Human Rights Commission and NI Equality Commission to monitor the implementation of these commitments.

Alongside ICTU and our allies across the rights and equality sector, we are regularly engaging with the Dedicated Mechanism on issues of concern. Last year we reported on the decision of the NI High Court and Court of Appeal in the case of *Re Dillon and others* – NI Troubles Legacy and Reconciliation Act 2023, which found that some provisions contained in the **NI Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023** were incompatible with the

European Convention on Human Rights and the non-diminution commitment within the Windsor Framework and that the immunity provisions under the Act should be disapplied.



Whilst undertaking to repeal and replace the Act, the UK Government has continued its appeal against the decision made by the NI courts in relation to the non-diminution of rights, with the case now due to be heard by the UK Supreme Court. This has caused concern across civil society that the protections within the Windsor Framework may be weakened. In our meetings with UK Government Ministers with ICTU, UNISON has continued to raise concern at this course of action by the Government.

As part of our work with ICTU on the new **'Good Jobs' Employment Rights legislation** (see further below), we are calling for the new legislation to reflect progressive developments at the EU level, particularly on collective bargaining.

We have continued to work with ICTU and the Women's Policy Group in calling for our gender equality laws to be updated in line with the obligations under the **EU Pay Transparency Directive (PTD)**. This followed the publication of a paper by the Dedicated Mechanism in 2024 which highlighted that the UK Government must transpose provisions of the PTD into NI law by 7th June 2026.

In February 2025, UNISON responded to the Department for Communities consultation on the development of **Gender Pay Gap regulations**, expressing our concern that the proposed regulations did not meet our requirements.



We highlighted that the proposed threshold for employers to report on the gender pay gap (proposed at 250 employees) was out of step with the PTD threshold, which sets the threshold at 100. UNISON, with ICTU and the Women's Policy Group, will continue to press to ensure that gender equality laws are updated in line with this Directive and the obligations under the Windsor Framework.

We continue to call for the introduction of a comprehensive and enforceable **NI Bill of Rights**.

The **Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA)** sets out the future relationship between the EU and UK. Whilst this contains some limited commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights by the UK, the TCA provisions on the 'level playing field' only relate to not lowering current levels of labour and social protections to the extent that any reductions may affect trade or investment.

As part of the TCA, the UK Government has established a **Domestic Advisory Group (DAG) on the TCA**. John Patrick Clayton represents NIC-ICTU on this body. It is through this that we continue to make representations to ensure that any actions taken when applying Level Playing Field commitments are consistent with the commitment to the non-diminution of rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity in NI.

UNISON has endorsed the **Common Travel Area (CTA) campaign**, alongside the Northwest Migrant Forum. The Common Travel Area allows us freedom to travel throughout GB and the island of Ireland. The campaign aims to raise awareness about the CTA, and to challenge discrimination against non-CTA nationals living, working and studying across both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland. The campaign is calling on both the UK and Irish Governments to extend the rights under the CTA to all legal residents across both jurisdictions.



Economic strategy and the NI budget

Despite the return of the NI Executive and Assembly in February 2024, the funding crisis affecting public services continues.

On 3rd April, the NI Executive agreed a **one-year budget for 2025-26**. In announcing the draft Budget for consultation on 19th December 2024, the Finance Minister stated that the financial outlook for public services remains incredibly difficult, with the bids for both resource and capital from all

Departments far outweighing the funding available.

The implications of the budget for public services and our members have been seen throughout the year. This has included an estimated deficit in the health budget of around £600M, with a significant amount of this deficit relating to our pay settlement.

It also resulted in the Education Authority introducing a moratorium in recruitment (with some exemptions) in June, citing a £320M deficit.

Last year we reported on an **Interim Fiscal Framework** being agreed between the Executive and the UK Treasury that provides that the Executive will be funded at a 124% needs-based adjustment factor from Barnett consequential, from the date of the Executive being restored in February 2024.

Whilst the agreement of this new arrangement for funding demonstrates some recognition that NI requires a needs-based approach to funding for public services, it is clear that the level of resources provided does not fund NI at the level of need.

As Dr Lisa Wilson from the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI) has previously noted, this change to the Fiscal Framework provides some recognition that delivering public services on par with those in England requires at least 24% higher investment due to differences in efficiencies, economies of scale and the different profile of needs in NI.

However, the 124% figure is contested and it should be recognised that years of underfunding beneath this needs level

significantly impacted public services, with the consequences of this continuing to take their toll in the years ahead.

Analysis by Ulster University's Strategic Policy Unit places the level of need at between 125% and 127%. It noted that NI's funding per head has been higher in the past at times, between 130% and 140%.



UNISON, alongside the wider trade union movement, has continued to make representations to the UK Government in relation to ensuring that public services in NI are funded on the basis of need. The lack of a genuine needs-based approach to funding for public services here, combined with a lack of multi-year budgeting undermines the stability of services and will significantly detrimentally impact on the most vulnerable in our society.



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.

Public procurement is the hot topic. It is estimated that each year around 5,000 contracts are awarded by public bodies, with up to £4 billion annual expenditure.

With the right conditions attached the spend can be used to pay the living wage, create jobs and support local businesses supplying goods, facilities and services which are normally supplied by the private sector.

With proper **ethical procurement conditions**, it is also possible to return outsourced public services back in-house. A recent UNISON

challenge to the UK Government on its promise to create the biggest in-sourcing in a generation and the threat of industrial action from UNISON members in the health service has forced delivery on this commitment in England.

No such commitment has been made by Government in NI and UNISON has renewed its challenge to the Executive to implement both ethical procurement processes and a programme of in-sourcing in areas such as medical treatment and social care.

We also continue to factor into our submissions to Government the need for genuine Equality Impact Assessments and Human Rights Impact Assessments in the public procurement process.

A variety of guidance notes and the 2023 Procurement Act are now in force in NI and include obligations on equality and human rights and the need to explicitly evaluate social value as an award criterion. This includes social values measures, such as:

- fair work practices, being required to be incorporated into government contracts;
- compliance with relevant employment, equality and health and safety laws;
- adherence to relevant collective agreements; and
- adoption of fair work practices for all workers engaged in the delivery of the contract, as defined by the Carnegie Trust.

The definition of Fair Work includes pay, terms and conditions and worker voice/representation (which includes trade union recognition).

Through our bargaining structures, we continue to seek to ensure that the policy is applied and implemented in relation to social care procurement. We are engaging with the Trusts, the Department of Health and through the re-started Social Care Fair Work Forum (see further below).

Over the last 12 months this has included seeking that the obligations set out in Scoring Social Value are fully reflected in any revised regional care homes contract.



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



Employment and trade union law

Employment and trade union law in NI is devolved. The 2020 New Decade, New Approach agreement committed the NI Executive to become a Living Wage employer, to ban zero hours contracts and to devolve powers to set minimum wage levels. Whilst some progress was made on securing the Living Wage, much more remains to be done to protect and enhance workers' rights.

Through ICTU, a priority demand of the trade union movement for a new Executive was to take forward strong, comprehensive employment legislation for NI, giving effect to commitments made under NDNA. A core part of this has been the demand for the right to collective bargaining for all workers.

Last year we reported on the response made to the consultation launched by the then Economy Minister, Conor Murphy MLA, on new 'Good Jobs' Employment Rights

legislation. UNISON worked alongside ICTU to carefully consider the detail of the proposals and make a comprehensive ICTU response. The Executive's Programme for Government (2024 – 2027) states that subject to Executive approval, the Executive proposes to introduce new Employment Rights Legislation.

Following the public consultation, the new Economy Minister, Caoimhe Archibald MLA, announced in April 2025 plans to bring forward the Bill. Many of the proposals reflect our trade union demands.

Whilst the detailed provisions of the Bill are currently being drafted, the Minister has proposed that under the Bill:

- workers on zero hours contracts will have the right to move to a banded hours contract that reflects their average working hours;

- workers on a zero hours contract will also have the right to reasonable notice of shifts, and the right to compensation if shifts are cancelled or curtailed at short notice;
- zero hours contracts will only be permissible for work that is genuinely casual or seasonal.

In response to a core trade union demand, it is proposed that there be an overarching aim of working towards the target in the EU Adequate Minimum Wage Directive of a collective bargaining coverage rate of 80%, and that to reach this target across the economy there needs to be an expansion of trade union membership.

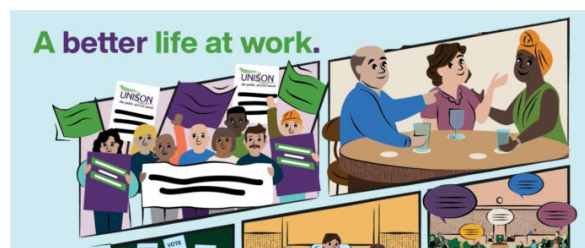
We hold the Minister to the statement that the legislation will give more workers the opportunity to be represented by a recognised trade union by:

- lowering the recognition threshold; and
- through trade unions being able to request access to a workplace including to negotiate with employers on issues such as terms, conditions and pay. Employers will not be permitted to unreasonably withhold access.

Whilst the ICTU has welcomed the proposed way forward as representing progress, it has highlighted that these proposals have yet to be translated into legislation and that this will require further detailed examination. UNISON continues to work alongside ICTU to meet with officials in the Department for the Economy as preparations are made to draft the Bill.

UNISON formed part of a Congress delegation that gave evidence to the Assembly Economy Committee on the proposed Bill in February 2025, and we anticipate that further detailed engagement with the Assembly will be required as the Bill is introduced.

Securing the passage of comprehensive, effective employment rights legislation before the end of the Assembly mandate in 2027 will continue to be a priority. We are also working in co-operation with our UNISON colleagues in London, UNISON Scotland and UNISON Cymru.



Three years after the Assembly passed the **Safe Leave (Paid Leave for Victims of Domestic Abuse) Bill 2022** victims of domestic abuse still cannot access this potentially lifesaving entitlement. The Department for the Economy has committed to the new law being in statute by the end of 2026 and UNISON will continue to lobby, through our partners in the NIC-ICTU Women's Committee for this commitment to be fulfilled.

The Employment Act (NI) 2016 legislated for **Gender Pay Reporting** but due to political instability there has been little progress on implementing the regulations required to enact this.

The Department for Communities launched a public consultation in late 2024 on draft regulations which proposed regulations requiring employers with 250+ staff to publish gender, ethnicity, and disability pay gap data, plus action plans.

In our response, UNISON criticised the proposed 250-employee threshold, arguing it excludes many NI employers and falls short of EU standards, where reporting begins at 100 employees or lower. We also insisted that overtime and bonuses are included, with averages over time replacing a single "snapshot" date to give a realistic representation of the inherent gender inequalities in society and the workplace that contribute to the gender pay gap.

Our response called for mandatory, detailed action plans backed by Departmental guidance, robust enforcement with escalating sanctions, and intersectional reporting on ethnicity and disability. Gender pay reporting must be a tool for real change, not symbolic data collection, and should be embedded within a holistic, government-wide approach to workplace equality.

In tackling the climate emergency, UNISON campaigns for a just transition, with poverty eradication and social justice at its core. There is a clear role for public services in tackling the climate emergency, delivering decarbonised and sustainable public services for the benefit of workers, the general public and the planet.

In responding to the draft Programme for Government consultation in November 2024, we noted the commitments around decarbonisation. This included:

- a commitment to invest £75M in an 'Invest to Save Fund' for the public sector to transition to net zero;
- the intention to publish a Circular Economy Strategy; and
- a commitment to establish a Just Transition Commission.

UNISON will continue to engage with Executive Departments as these measures are taken forward to support the public sector in the transition to net zero.

In the recent public consultation on the first [NI Climate Action Plan \(2023-27\)](#) we also called on the Executive to ensure that the Just Transition process secures the futures of workers and their communities, based on dialogue between employers, government, workers and their unions. We are also clear that Government must ensure adequate

funding to decarbonise NI's public services, rather than diverting money from already underfunded public services or relying on private investment.

What is Green UNISON Week?

Green UNISON Week is held every year offering a focused opportunity for members and branches to raise awareness of green issues in their workplaces, to plan activities that encourage and enable members to get more active, and to celebrate all the things they are already doing in support of the green agenda – not just in work, but anywhere.

This year Green Week is especially important as it will kick start UNISON's Year of Green Activity for 2026!

As UNISON prepares to launch the 'Year of Green Activity' in 2026, we will be supporting branches to fill their Environmental Officer posts and organising the Green Network to plan a regional programme of events highlighting the key environmental concerns for UNISON members in NI.



LOW PAY, POVERTY AND TARGETING SOCIAL NEED



Challenging poverty and welfare reform

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

The impact of the **cost-of-living crisis** continues to be felt across our membership, particularly amongst the lowest paid. This lived reality shapes all of our policy and campaigning priorities, underpinning our responses to the severe cuts in public spending, which we know will fall most heavily on people already experiencing poverty.

The NI Poverty and Income Inequality Report 2023/24 published by the Department for Communities in March 2025 revealed that 23% of children were living in relative poverty (before housing costs) with the number of children in absolute poverty (before housing costs) rising to 20%. The proportion of working-age adults in relative poverty is now 15% and the number of working-age adults in absolute poverty has increased to 15%. The proportion of pensioners in relative poverty has remained at 12% but absolute poverty has increased from 7% to 9% in this age category.

While employment can lower the risk of poverty among working-age adults, most people living in relative poverty are in households with someone in work, showing that simply increasing employment cannot be the sole focus in efforts to end poverty.

In March 2025 the UK government published the 'Pathways to Work' Green Paper outlining proposals to significantly cut disability benefits. The paper was widely criticised by disability rights organisations and social security experts in NI, who highlighted the disproportionate impact they would have here. UNISON joined our colleagues across the trade union movement to protest these proposed cuts and in June 2025 the UK government withdrew their plans.

In June 2025, the Department for Communities published a **draft Anti-Poverty Strategy**, with the approval of the NI Executive. Despite the fact that we have waited over 20 years since this strategy was first committed to and following two successful court cases forcing the Executive to act, this draft was clearly inadequate. Alongside our civil society partners, UNISON stated clearly in the public consultation that we consider the draft Strategy not fit for purpose. We will be calling on the NI Executive to reject this strategy when it comes back to them unless significant changes are made.



Whilst UNISON understands the need for the Executive to meet their statutory duty to adopt an Anti-Poverty Strategy, we believe that a poor strategy can do more harm than good, and we will not accept policy that is set up to fail our members and their families. Having represented NIC-ICTU on the Anti-Poverty Co-design group since 2020, UNISON now holds the chair of the Anti-Poverty Group and will continue to play a leading role in pushing the NI Executive to develop an ambitious, evidence-based Anti-Poverty Strategy with concrete interventions and measurable time-bound targets, underpinned by legislation and effective accountability mechanisms.

UNISON plays an active role in the **Cliff Edge Coalition** – a group of over 100 organisations from across NI which came together to campaign for the extension of welfare mitigations.

The Coalition's campaigning to date has been successful and the NI Assembly has legislated to indefinitely retain the mitigations for the bedroom tax; close the loopholes which had been preventing people from accessing financial assistance through the mitigation scheme; and extend the Benefit Cap mitigations until 2028. The Coalition's new asks are for Government to resolve the 5-week wait for Universal Credit, remove the two-child limit and provide support for private renters affected by the Local Housing Allowance.



We contributed to the Coalition's response to the UK Government's 'Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working Green Paper'. In this response, the Coalition highlights the disproportionate impact which the proposed policy measures outlined in the Green Paper will have upon individuals across NI.

In June 2025, the Coalition's Working Group hosted an online event focused on this response, in which Coalition's members delivered presentations and a question and answer session was facilitated. This event provided a critical space for organisations to share concerns, whilst outline ways in which we can move forward in a constructive, collective manner as we navigate the uncertainty of these proposals.

The Coalition also responded to the draft Programme for Government 2024-27, 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'. The response confronted the PfG's absence of focus on poverty and called for the insertion of a new priority to address this. It called on the Executive to adopt the Coalition's three key asks as concrete actions that can be realised within the 3-year span of the document. We also created resources to help Coalition member organisations and others to submit their own responses to the draft PfG.



Caoimhe McNeill (Policy and Bargaining Support Organiser) represents

UNISON on the Board of The NI Anti-Poverty Network (NIAPN). Over the past three years, NIAPN has rebuilt and strengthened its Network and re-established itself as a critical voice for the anti-poverty sector in NI.

NIAPN is working collectively on many different events and campaigns through the Cliff Edge Coalition, the Equality Coalition, Child Poverty Alliance, End Child Poverty UK and the Fuel Poverty Coalition.

NIAPN is leading a unified voice from across civic society calling on the Executive to withdraw support from the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy on the basis that it neither meets the standard criteria for a strategy with measurables, targets, timeframes and fundings, nor has it embedded the recommendations from the Anti-Poverty Strategy Group or the Expert Panel.



NIAPN has an 'Experts by experience' advisory panel which helps form NIAPN's strategic priorities and participates in NIAPN's activities. NIAPN has a blog on its website to provide space for member organisations to write short pieces that highlight the work, campaigns or initiatives that they are spearheading. The NIAPN advisory panel and some members of the Board travelled together to Scotland to learn from the Poverty Alliance in Scotland and their experiences of integrating lived experience into policy making.

NIAPN is funded by Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, which will enable NIAPN to challenge the policies that are causing such stress to the growing numbers experiencing poverty.

In responding to the Department for Communities EQIA on its 2025/26 Budget, we noted that the Department is facing an allocation of £270M in Net Capital including a specific allocation of £100M for social housing. We were particularly concerned about the implications for the construction of social housing as this is 38% less than the Department's bid for 2025-26.

The £63M allocation to New Building Social Homes will allow for up to 1000 new build social home starts in 2025-26 – falling significantly short of the target of 2,000 new homes under the Social Housing Development Programme.

There are currently over 49,000 on the waiting list for a social home, including over 36,000 people deemed to be in housing stress (in priority need of housing). Building social homes at a rate of just 1000 per year will lead to longer waiting lists, longer waiting times for those on the list and an increasing overreliance on temporary accommodation to solve our housing crisis.

In our response, we highlighted the adverse impacts currently experienced by Catholic households due to the inadequate supply of social housing, including longer waiting times. We are concerned that, due to the Department's constrained Capital allocation and resulting budget policy, failure to progress the building of social housing in areas of

greatest objective need will only exacerbate these existing religious inequalities.



There are also adverse impacts for people from minority ethnic backgrounds (who tend to experience significantly more overcrowding), single people (who experience poorer housing conditions), older women (who experience poorer housing conditions than men in rural areas), disabled people (who are more likely to live in poor housing conditions and in homes that are ill equipped for their needs) and households with dependents (who are more likely to live in overcrowded social homes).

The Minister is committed to an additional £3.7M in homelessness funding. A recent report published by Simon Community identified a possible 24,000 households experiencing homelessness across NI, in addition to the 55,500 people already officially registered as homeless.

In responding to the consultation, we expressed our concern that this is still an insufficient budget to mitigate the impacts of sustained inadequate investment in the Supporting People Programme in recent years.

We engage with the community and voluntary sector (VCS) through the Equality Coalition; through ad-hoc groups dealing with the post-Brexit impact; through local engagement with UNISON branches; through our growing membership within the sector itself; and through the collective bargaining process with VCS employers.

In July 2025, the Department for Communities launched the new Partnership Agreement between government and the VCS, including a set of **Fair Funding Principles**.



These were jointly developed by officials across Departments and VCS representatives.

Despite this new commitment to fair funding, concerns about Departmental budget cuts persist, continuing the challenges for VCS organisations that we highlighted in last year's report. These Departments fund many of the programmes delivered by our members in the VCS, and the impact of cuts remains significant.

While these pressures are ongoing, we remain proactive in representing our members' interests, responding robustly to consultations, and working to ensure the value and impact of the sector are clearly recognised.

In responding to the Department for Communities EQIA on its 2025/26 Budget, we noted that it has increased funding to the sector by £2.8M. There was a significant lack of detail on how this funding will be used; how it will be distributed across the sector; and if it will be equally distributed among organisations working with marginalised and vulnerable people. We will continue to press the Department for transparency and clarity on how this funding will be managed.

While the recent funding uplift is welcome, it is not enough to address the long-term impact of sustained cuts to the community and voluntary sector. Over a number of years, reductions in funding have created significant challenges for organisations in the sector, many of which are now struggling to maintain services and provide stable employment for their staff.

These cuts have contributed to a growing problem of insecure employment across the sector with many workers in precarious employment, on low pay and short-term contracts. UNISON has raised these concerns consistently and continues to call on the Department for Communities to take a strategic look at how this sector is funded.

The **Supporting People programme** provides vulnerable people with support to live independently in the community, including

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



While this year's increase in funding is welcome, it is far from sufficient to reverse the damage caused by years of underinvestment. UNISON continues to press the Department for Communities, the Housing Executive and other public bodies to ensure sustainable funding arrangements that deliver decent pay and conditions for Supporting People staff.

Core grant funding: Having reported last year on the uncertainty surrounding the future of the Department of Health's Core Grant Scheme, significant changes to this funding scheme for the VCS have seriously destabilised a number of organisations. With nearly 260 organisations applying for a meagre fund of £1.8M, only 25 were successful.

UNISON supports calls for all Departments to demonstrate respect for the crucial role of the VCS by committing to core funding rather than relying on short term service delivery or project-based funding models that prevent the sector from providing secure, well-paid employment for our members. This is particularly critical for those organisations at the front-line tackling violence against women and girls and growing racism.

UNISON CAMPAIGNS IN HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

There are many reasons why the NI health and social care system is in crisis. They include the following.

- The absence of Government over long periods of time when critical decisions needed to be made on the future shape of our health and social care system.
- The imposition of the wrong model by Direct Rule Governments during the absence of the NI Executive.
- A massive reduction in democratic engagement, public accountability and effective governance.
- The growing privatisation and out-sourcing of health and social care.
- Failure to properly respect, recognise and reward the workforce. This has resulted in thousands of vacancies in critical areas and forced UNISON members to take industrial action over a 5-year period. At the time of writing this report we face yet another ballot for industrial action as the Government has again broken faith with us on pay parity.

UNISON continues to campaign and influence health and social care policy and budget allocations. Having reported last year on NI Executive cuts to health and social care spending in 2024/25, the funding allocation in 2025/26 remains inadequate.

Taking in-year allocations into account, the £8.388 billion Department of Health budget represents just a 2.6% increase in spending from the previous year, which falls far short of meeting the increasing costs of running the health and social care service.

We continue to lobby the Department of Health and NI Executive for a long-term funding strategy that reflects a genuine assessment of need as we look towards a return to multi-year budgets. This includes calling for a reversal of the privatisation agenda which is failing health and social care workers, service users and the public purse.

Transformation Oversight Structures:

UNISON represents ICTU on the Improvement and Transformation Advisory Board (ITAB) and we have previously reported on our challenges to the process by which ITAB has been created and its terms of reference. ITAB initially sat alongside a Health and Social Care Performance and Transformation Executive Board (PTEB), which itself replaced the previous Management Board for Rebuilding HSC Services.

PTEB itself has now been replaced by a new structure and the Department has indicated that it also intends to further review ITAB. This is more of the strategy of keeping the health service in a constant state of review and reorganisation instead of working with us to develop effective models of health and social care delivery.



Partnership Forum: Through our work with the NIC ICTU Health Committee, we have called on both the Health Minister and new Permanent Secretary to reconvene the Health Services Partnership Forum. This Forum brought together trade unions, HSC employers and the Department with the intention of having strategic, partnership-based discussion on both policy development and service delivery, considering workforce issues and how to tackle health inequalities. We still await a response.

Cuts to health and social care budgets: As with last year, the Department of Health has a significant deficit in its 25/26 budget, which it has estimated as around £600M, including

the funding required to implement the PRB recommended pay increase for the AfC workforce. UNISON will continue to defend the interests of the workforce and resist any cuts proposals detrimentally impacting on them and negatively impacting on the provision of services.

The Minister has stated that he will not make “catastrophic” cuts. However, we continue to monitor this situation closely. The position in health and social care reinforces the need for the Executive to secure a fair, needs-based funding settlement on a multi-year basis as an urgent priority.

Safe staffing legislation: UNISON has taken the lead on this issue. It derives from a commitment secured after our 2019/20 industrial action across the health service. The development of the legislation was delayed due to Covid and the absence of Government. However, we continue to work with Departmental officials to progress this key piece of legislation. Further details are reported in Section Two as this is a core issue spanning UNISON’s bargaining and campaigning objectives in particular.



Reform of Adult Social Care: As reported in Section Two, we continue to seek improvements in pay, terms and conditions for the social care workforce through the Fair Work Forum. Given that the work of the Forum will straddle UNISON’s bargaining and campaigning objectives in particular, we are reporting under both sections of this report. UNISON continues to represent trade unions within the Social Care Collaborative Forum involving private care providers, HSC Trusts, Departmental officials, service users, and carers representatives considering wider reform of social care services.

Northern Trust Emergency General Surgery: UNISON has been actively challenging the review into the provision of Emergency General Surgery in the Northern Trust. At the time of Regional Council 2024, the Trust had

proposed that emergency general surgery would be centralised at Antrim Area Hospital, with the majority of elective general surgery taking place in Causeway Hospital. We engaged with the public consultation and highlighted our concerns regarding the sustainability challenges the service faces and the potential threat to other services, particularly in the Causeway Hospital.

We raised concerns about the lack of trade union involvement at certain stages of the process; the absence of a workforce assessment; and the barriers that exist in accessing services including transport, poverty, disability and caring responsibilities. We called for stronger consideration for women, carers and disabled staff.

On 22 May 2025, the Trust Board approved a recommendation to proceed with centralising EGS at Antrim Area Hospital and shifting most elective general surgery to Causeway Hospital. The Trust is now awaiting approval from the Health Minister.

South West Acute Hospital Emergency General Surgery: In December 2022, the Western HSC Trust paused all Emergency General Surgery in the South West Acute Hospital (SWAH) and put contingency plans in place to provide this service at Altnagelvin Hospital, Craigavon Area Hospital and Sligo General Hospital.

As well as the direct action taken by our members and the community, we emphasised the need for full engagement with trade unions and highlighted our concerns at the impact this suspension would have on its Acute Hospital status.



The Western Trust launched a consultation in July 2025 to make this change permanent. Our members have continued with their campaign against these proposals. Following

growing public concern and criticism over how the consultation was being conducted the Health Minister intervened, leading to the current pause and reset of the process. We will continue to engage with this process and support our members in the campaign against these changes.

Pathology Blueprint: In 2022, the Pathology Blueprint Programme was established to design the regional management structure, and the Minister is now considering moving into the transition phase based on the recent Equality Impact Assessment consultation.

In our responses we argued that the EQIA was too limited, as it only looked at pathology and corporate staff and ignored patients and the wider workforce. We welcomed commitments to support disabled staff but stressed this must apply throughout the whole transformation, with proper mitigations where needed.

We supported the use of remote technologies to reduce travel but highlighted the risks of digital exclusion in rural areas and called for proper training and equipment for staff. We also urged the Department to disaggregate equality data by geography and socioeconomic status, criticised the lack of alternative policy options or robust mitigations, and strongly opposed any move towards outsourcing pathology services.

‘Hospitals – Creating a Network for Better Outcomes’: In responding to the consultation UNISON expressed our disappointment that many of our earlier recommendations were not incorporated into the final document and stressed the need for clarity, transparency, and accountability in decisions about hospital reconfiguration.

Although reducing inequalities is presented as a key goal of the framework, the consultation fails to outline how this will be achieved or measured. We stressed the importance of wider government action on poverty reduction and investment in deprived areas, alongside health system reforms, to ensure reconfiguration genuinely addresses inequalities. We also emphasised the importance of early, meaningful

engagement with both the workforce and local communities.

We stressed that when considering service reconfiguration, issues relating to staff at all grades must be considered, with strong protections in place for all employees, including commitments against compulsory redundancy, redeployment support, and retraining opportunities.



Finally, we raised specific concerns about the categorisation of hospitals, especially the proposal to potentially redesignate Causeway Hospital as an Elective Care Centre. Overall, UNISON called for stronger safeguards, genuine engagement, and a public-sector-first approach to ensure hospital network reforms deliver fairer and more effective healthcare outcomes. We remain sceptical about the outcome.

At the time of writing, Regional Committee has commissioned a special edition of ‘The View’ magazine as an element of our programme to reignite the public challenge on the state of our health and social care system and growing privatisation.



UNISON CAMPAIGNS IN EDUCATION

We continued to engage with the Department, Assembly and Education Authority throughout the year on our priority policy and campaigns agenda.

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; and
- that protects children and workers from growing racism.

We continue to seek to align our work in education policy and campaigns with our efforts on behalf of our members working across education at the bargaining table, as set out in section 2.



Free School Meals for All: Our Free School Meals Campaign has continued with the restoration of the Executive and Assembly. We are demanding universal free school meal (FSM) provision for all children and young people. The campaign objectives are:

- to seek universal, nutritious, free schools meals for all pupils to both reduce poverty and improve public health;
- to safeguard and promote the vital work of our members within schools catering - school meals should be publicly provided;
- to build support for the implementation of a public health model across Government that is aimed at dealing with health and educational inequalities.



A public consultation on eligibility criteria for Free School Meals and Uniform grants was launched in November 2024 by the current Minister Paul Givan. The consultation gave a range of options including:

- raising the household income threshold for eligibility;
- implementing Universal Free School Meals from nursery to P3, P7 or Year 14 with no changes to the income threshold for eligibility;
- implementing Universal Free School Meals from nursery to P3 or P7 and raising the income threshold for eligibility;
- retaining the status quo.



In our response to the consultation we called for FSM to be fully embedded in the NI Executive's Programme for Government. Despite progress elsewhere in the UK, the draft PfG published in late 2024 made no mention of FSM.

We expressed our strong support for universal FSM for all, recognising that phased approaches may be necessary but opposing any reliance on threshold adjustments alone. We also stressed that delivery of school meals must remain public and that staff should be protected and valued.

Additionally, we raised concerns including the disproportionate impact of current criteria on rural families, the shortcomings of Universal Credit as a gateway to entitlement and research from NICCY which recommended that eligibility criteria should consider adjustments for family size.

Throughout the consultation period we worked with allies in the Equality Coalition, NIAPN and Women's Policy Group on their responses in order to maximise our message of calling for publicly delivered universal free school meals for all.

In July, the Education Minister gave his response to the consultation findings with an announcement that from the 2025/2026 academic year, the income threshold for families receiving Universal Credit would increase from £15,000 to £15,390. This is an uplift that reflects inflation. However, the Minister has stated that, due to the budgetary constraints facing the Department and the Executive he cannot move to introduction universal FSM provision at this point.

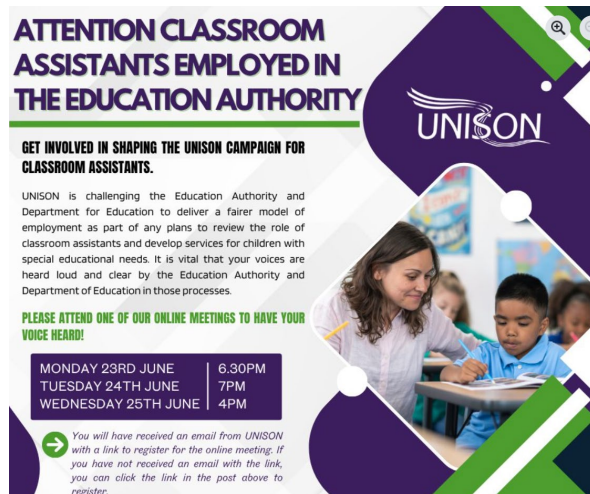


While we are disappointed with this outcome, we are determined to continue to push our campaign objectives and met with the UNISON campaign sub group in late September to plan for the next stages of the campaign.

Classroom assistants campaign planning: After years of collective bargaining and industrial action, it is clear that there are systemic issues affecting classroom assistants that would benefit from a strategic public campaign.

Our classroom assistant members came together for a series of discussions in June 2025 where a list of key campaign issues was agreed. The policy team is currently developing a background paper and draft campaign plan to bring back to members in late October.

Whilst this work gets underway, we are mindful that our education reps are working with the Education Authority on a suite of changes they are developing under four key workstreams. These changes will address the issues of temporary contracts, job descriptions, professional development and the introduction of a bank system for filling temporary positions.



ATTENTION CLASSROOM ASSISTANTS EMPLOYED IN THE EDUCATION AUTHORITY

GET INVOLVED IN SHAPING THE UNISON CAMPAIGN FOR CLASSROOM ASSISTANTS.

UNISON is challenging the Education Authority and Department for Education to deliver a fairer model of employment as part of any plans to review the role of classroom assistants and develop services for children with special educational needs. It is vital that your voices are heard loud and clear by the Education Authority and Department of Education in those processes.

PLEASE ATTEND ONE OF OUR ONLINE MEETINGS TO HAVE YOUR VOICE HEARD!

MONDAY 23RD JUNE	6.30PM
TUESDAY 24TH JUNE	7PM
WEDNESDAY 25TH JUNE	4PM

You will have received an email from UNISON with a link to register for the online meeting. If you have not received an email with the link, you can click the link in the post above to register.

Our members believe that a wider public campaign is required to increase the visibility of classrooms assistants in order to secure the public and political support necessary for these proposed changes to be achieved.

This campaign will therefore be aimed at ensuring the Department for Education prioritises classroom assistants in its policy and budget, and that the Executive commits to funding the necessary changes. The policy team looks forward to supporting our classroom assistant members with this vital work.

Regional Assessment of Need: UNISON responded to a consultation on the Regional Assessment of Need, outlining the union's views on youth services, workforce issues, and support for children and young people in NI.

We raised strong concerns about NI's over-reliance on volunteers in youth services, calling instead for proper workforce planning and investment in paid staff. We supported a universal youth service with extended access, the creation of a curriculum forum to improve consistency and inclusivity, and stronger partnership frameworks co-designed with the workforce.

We also endorsed priorities such as tackling violence against women and girls through early intervention and ensuring inclusive, well-resourced provision for children with special educational needs.

Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE): The Education Committee's inquiry into RSE is actively ongoing. Since launching in September 2024, they've gathered testimonies from a wide range of stakeholders—including mental health professionals, faith groups, educational researchers, and reproductive rights advocates.



This inquiry follows the introduction of updated RSE regulations, informed by the public consultation that was completed in 2023. The Education Committee is now continuing its work to translate evidence into meaningful policy recommendations that should help inform the implementation of the new statutory duties around RSE and what should be delivered in schools.

This remains an ongoing UNISON campaign and a campaign through the Equality Coalition. We have continued to work with allies in the Women's sector and LGBT+ sector on this matter.

Holiday Hunger: UNISON responded to the Holiday Hunger Private Members' Bill Consultation, setting out our support for a School Holiday Food Grant to tackle child poverty, improve nutrition, and reduce educational inequalities.

We argued that cash payments to families worked best, as they protected dignity, allowed for dietary needs, and reduced waste, and we raised concerns that linking eligibility to free school meal criteria excluded many children in poverty.

We highlighted that the proposed £27 per fortnight was inadequate given rising food and energy costs, and we called for payments that reflected the real cost of providing healthy meals at home. We also supported extending additional financial support to families with deaf and disabled children up to age 24, recognising the extra needs during transition to adulthood.



DEMANDING EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

In previous reports, we have highlighted the gradual roll back on the rights and equality commitments made in The Good Friday Agreement which were central to UNISON support for this Agreement in the 1998 referendum. The St Andrew's Agreement in 2006 added a commitment to a statutory anti-poverty strategy on the basis of objective need, but subsequent Agreements such as Stormont House and Fresh Start have radically demoted equality and moved away from a Bill of Rights for NI.

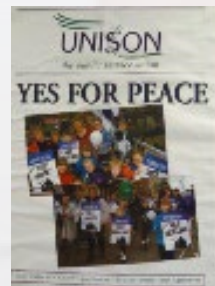
The 'New Decade, New Approach' agreement contained a range of commitments on human rights and equality strategies. Alongside our allies, pressing for delivery of these commitments is a key priority of the Regional Committee. Unfortunately, the Programme for Government agreed by the NI Executive in January 2025 makes scant reference to these human rights and equality commitments.

As far right mobilisation increases at a community level, it can in part be attributed to the failure of our political institutions to

deliver a rights-respecting society with effective equality protections.

We have been pleased to see the Assembly Committee for the Executive Office undertake an inquiry into the gaps in our equality laws, which are woefully out of date. However, the outcome of this process has still not been published.

Enforcement and accountability mechanisms remain weak, and many of the positive action schemes, mostly community based, are under threat. Despite this, our members have consistently reaffirmed support for the Peace Agreement and, in particular, the equality and human rights aspects which our public services play a key role in delivering.



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

We responded to the consultation earlier this year on what a private member's bill to prohibit **Age Discrimination in Goods, Facilities and Services** should look like. We emphasised that protections must include children and young people, not just those over 18. As highlighted in the Committee for the Executive Office inquiry, the lack of age discrimination law is one of the most glaring gaps in equality protection in NI, placing us far behind the laws in GB and Ireland.

In the consultation we highlighted that exceptions should only be allowed where they serve a clear social policy aim, not financial interests, and positive action to support disadvantaged age groups should be encouraged. The introduction of age discrimination legislation is long overdue and we look forward to continued engagement on the development of this bill.

As members of the **Banning Conversion Practices Coalition** we responded to the consultation earlier this year on what a Private Member's Bill should look like. We fully support legislation to criminalise these harmful practices. We believe that any attempt to suppress someone's identity is inherently unreasonable.

We welcomed the proposed sentencing and protections, including for those at risk of being taken abroad for conversion practices. This legislation will strengthen human rights and we urge strong enforcement, public education and support for victims to ensure it makes a real impact.





The Equality Coalition is co-convened by UNISON and the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) and has over 100 member organisations, with its membership continuing to grow further year on year. A number of these members are umbrella groups and the largest and most diverse is the trade union movement. There has been, and remains, no other collective voice on equality in NI and no other overarching consistent 'critical friend' of the equality oversight bodies, public authorities, and local government.

A key part of the Coalition's work centres on encouraging application of the Section 75 equality duties and engaging regularly with the Equality Commission for NI (ECNI). The work of the Coalition is supported by the UNISON Campaign Fund.

This year, the Coalition continued to hold regular meetings with our members, where we discussed how best to advance the equality agenda in NI, in addition to offering our members capacity building training sessions and organising events about key issues.

Anti-Poverty Strategy: The Equality Coalition has remained at the forefront of campaigning for an Anti-Poverty Strategy for NI. Following a successful judicial review taken by CAJ, we have worked closely with Anti-Poverty Strategy Group members to monitor its implementation. During the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy consultation period, we produced a comparator between the draft strategy and the recommendations of the Expert Panel and Co-design group, supporting our members' advocacy in this area.

We continue to press for a robust, rights-based Anti-Poverty Strategy that reflects these recommendations and delivers meaningful change for those most affected by poverty and inequality.



CAJ, UNISON, PILS and Equality Coalition members standing together outside the High Court.

Tackling the far right: We commissioned local tech experts in the Rabble Cooperative to carry out a study of online activity linked to violent far-right protests in Belfast and earlier incidents of racist housing intimidation. The research analysed activity across X, Facebook, and Instagram, and in April and May we published the *Mapping Far Right Activity Online in NI Project Report*, which was launched at events in Belfast and Derry.

This report received widespread media coverage, featuring in both the New York Times and Al Jazeera. Building on this work, the Coalition established the *Far-right activity in racist incidents monitoring and interventions subgroup*, which provides a forum for collective and coordinated activity.

A follow-up project further expanded this work, culminating in the October 2025 launch of an additional report: *Inciting a pogrom? Social media and the racist disorder in Ballymena and beyond during summer 2025*.

Advocacy and Influence: The Coalition has continued to prioritise protecting and enhancing human rights. Early in 2024, we developed a list of Programme for Government (PfG) policy asks, organised by Stormont Department, and have continued to use this document in meetings with Ministers throughout 2025.

The Coalition is also represented on the Civic Delegation to the Windsor Framework Implementation, advocating for rights and equality in NI.



Research and policy work: Our policy and advocacy work remains grounded in collaboration, ensuring our members' voices are represented in consultations and decision-making processes. We commissioned independent researcher Robbie McVeigh to examine the use of Section 75 and the 'call-in mechanism' in local councils. He produced a report which was launched in Stormont in June 2025.

Additionally, we responded to the NI Assembly and Executive Review Committee's inquiry into institutional reform, pressing for implementation of outstanding rights-based safeguards from the Good Friday Agreement. We also provided members with briefings on the Final Programme for Government and the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy.

Administrative remedies: We continue to promote the effective application of the public sector equality duty (Section 75) in public policy decisions at all levels. Following our recommendations, the Department of Finance committed to changes in their Equality Scheme, which are now being formalised.

We also supported many member groups with Section 75 legal interventions, through

our new Legal Interventions Subgroup, which brings together members with legal expertise or interest in litigation to coordinate and share strategies for interventions. It has so far focused on housing intimidation, bilingual signage, and the Anti-Poverty Strategy, with valuable input from legal experts.

Events and training: The Coalition has been highly active in organising events and campaigns this year, all of which were well attended and well received.

- January 2025: In partnership with Ulster University's Transitional Justice Institute, we hosted an event on the enforcement of Section 75 statutory duties.
- March 2025: A strategic planning day was held with CAJ and UNISON, helping to shape our priorities for the year ahead.
- April 2025: Training delivered by FactCheck NI on misinformation strengthened participants' ability to counter disinformation in equality and rights advocacy.
- April-May 2025: We launched the *Mapping Far Right Activity Online in NI Project Report* in Derry and Belfast, which received widespread media coverage.
- June 2025: We launched *Screened Out Without Mitigation: Returning Equality in NI to the Margins* at Stormont.
- July 2025: We held a seminar on co-design, where members shared experiences of departmental co-design processes for equality and rights strategies. The seminar highlighted major shortcomings, and we are now compiling these experiences for publication.



Panellists at the Equality Coalition's Enforcement of Statutory Duties event in January

Despite opposition from all sections of NI society, including political parties, victims and survivors, the trade union movement, civil society in general and international human rights bodies, the previous Conservative Government moved ahead with the NI Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023.

On the 1st May 2024, the Act shut down the previous justice and truth-recovery mechanisms that had been operating for 20 years, including inquests and civil claims. Instead, the Tory Government appointed an Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR) to review certain cases, alongside an immunity scheme. Key areas of the ICRIR's remit and the immunity scheme were subsequently ruled unlawful, due to incompatibility with the ECHR and the Windsor Framework.

In their manifesto, the current Labour government pledged to repeal and replace the Legacy Act but has not yet done so. However, the UK and Irish Governments have now reached agreement on a Joint Framework on new legacy arrangements, which include fundamental reform of the ICRIR and removing the ban on inquests and civil court cases.

Given the damage that has been done by the imposition of the 2023 Act, despite widespread opposition, good faith implementation of this new framework will be essential. We will continue working alongside ICTU, victims and survivors' groups, and our allies across civic society to engage with the new UK Government to seek to ensure that this Joint Framework is implemented in a human rights compliant manner.



UNISON has given support over many years to the campaign for a public inquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane. This inquiry was announced in September 2024, and we wish to see it taken forward in a human rights compliant manner.

UNISON is represented on the HRC Board by Head of Organising, Thomas Mahaffy. The HRC is a broad alliance of 170 civil society organisations from across all communities, sectors and areas of NI established to campaign for a strong, inclusive and enforceable Bill of Rights. It is also engaged in a number of other forums with UNISON, CAJ, the Equality Coalition and others and much of this summary reflects that collective work.

Over the last year, sustained efforts have been made to increase pressure on both the UK and Irish Governments to fulfil their commitment to deliver a **NI Bill of Rights**. Advocacy has focused on renewing political attention to this obligation by the NIO and emphasising the transformative potential of a rights-based

framework in addressing inequality, division and ensuring sustainable governance in NI. In parallel, work has been undertaken to encourage local political parties to engage constructively with rights-based approaches.



The past year also saw active engagement with the **UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)** as part of the UK's periodic review under that treaty. The HRC facilitated civil society engagement in the review process, including holding an ICESCR shadow report workshop and drafting an updated shadow report to the UNESCR

Committee. This was endorsed by 24 of our members and highlighted that ongoing failure to implement a NI Bill of Rights is a breach of international human rights obligations. In its Concluding Observations the Committee urged the UK Government to expedite the adoption of a Bill of Rights to ensure that economic, social, and cultural rights are fully enforceable in domestic law. The observations will be used to hold the NI Executive and UK Government to account for delivery.

The HRC co-hosted a seminar with Disability Action and the Alliance Party on efforts to introduce a Private Members Bill to ensure public authorities had due regard to the **UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities** when exercising of their duties.

As with UNISON, ICTU, the Equality Coalition and the women's sector, the HRC has urged the Department of Communities to take immediate steps to incorporate the **EU Pay Transparency Directive** into NI law. This was also raised as part of the NI Civic Working group's engagement with EU and UK officials on the Specialised Committee set up to oversee the implementation of the Windsor Framework. The UK and EU have now agreed that the Directive does trigger the legal duties under the Framework.

The HRC delivered a bespoke training programme on **Article 2 of the Windsor Framework** for civil society organisations. This was developed by the HRC and Queen's University, with 15 sessions delivered to 150 participants. The training helps participants to identify potential rights breaches, understand the legal mechanisms available to address these, and how to effectively advocate for the maintenance of equality and safeguards for vulnerable groups across all communities.

At the request of a range of rural civil society groups, the HRC was invited to support the Save our Acute Services (SOAS) group campaigning for the **return of emergency services to the South West Acute Hospital**.

In December we published (via the Civil Society Alliance project) "**Devolution in a Post-Brexit**

"Landscape: A Civil Society Perspective"

exploring the legal and administrative challenges arising from the UK Government's post-Brexit regulatory strategies and their impact on the devolved governments.

From 2nd-10th December 2024 we organised a programme of 30 events for the **NI Human Rights Festival**. This continues to provide a unique opportunity for the HRC, its members and wider civil society to explore with the public a range of domestic and international human rights issues.



The HRC continues to be an active leader in the UK wide **Save our Human Rights Act coalition** and steering group. Unfortunately the threats to both ECHR and the HRA have re-emerged under the Labour Government following the announcement of their review into Article 3 and 8 and its application to migration cases.

This comes on the back of parallel pressure from Reform and the Tories to either withdraw the UK from the Convention or seek its reform. The HRC has continued to mobilise NI specific arguments in defence of the HRA/ECHR and has challenged any threat to the centrality of the ECHR to the Good Friday Agreement.

The HRC helped negotiate and draft the new **Partnership Agreement between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in NI**. This includes a shared commitment to human rights, equality, and anti-discrimination but will require further monitoring and implementation to ensure it makes an active difference to day-to-day governance and decision-making processes here.

UNISON continues to work in partnership with Participation and Practice of Rights (PPR) which was founded by former UNISON Regional Secretary, Inez McCormack. PPR puts human rights tools at the service of marginalised communities.



Head of Organising, Thomas Mahaffy and Policy Officer Kellie Turtle, represents UNISON on PPR's Management Committee and UNISON supports PPR organising and training initiatives across issues of housing, climate action, mental health and migration.

The official **NI housing waiting list** has now reached over 49,000 households - 13,500 in Belfast alone. Over 6,000 children in Belfast are now considered officially (FDA) homeless.

This summer PPR's **Take Back the City** (TBTC) campaign co-hosted 'The State of Belfast' exhibition in the MAC in partnership with the Grenfell Foundation and the Tate Foundation. It offered a range of workshops, events and film screenings and showcased the campaign's masterplan for Mackie's. This has gained huge support from the community with 91% of consultees agreeing that the land should be developed and over 75% endorsing the TBTC Masterplan.

TBTC's team has been organising with homeless families, school children and community groups in gardens across the city, supporting rewilding and reclaiming public land for food growing. Our thanks to all the kids and teachers from schools around the site and further afield who have taken part!

New script for mental health activists are campaigning to transform how people in emotional distress are supported. On world mental health day in October 2024, activists launched their 'Give 5' initiative which shines a light on the Government action required to improve societal mental health. Give 5 has

the endorsement of 6 local political parties and campaigners are now acting to show what the Give 5's themes look like in practice. In August, they launched the 'Ticking Boxes' music video with Damien Dempsey and the Féile Women's Choir.

Asylum and anti-racism: Far right groups are organising regular violent attacks on Black and Minority Ethnic Groups. PPR has been supporting business owners who have been refused insurance, denied compensation and had meagre offers of state support, despite public promises to the contrary. Belfast City Council failed to fulfil its promises to provide financial assistance to business owners who had lost everything in the August riots and in May scores of people took action in support of the victims by contacting the Council's Chief Executive and elected members.

Our **Kind Economy** activists worked with the Belfast Film Festival to produce a documentary 'Seeking Home'. This film focused about the experiences of a refugee family trying to find a home after they were evicted from temporary accommodation for trying to speak up about their experiences. The family were eventually rehoused thanks to the support of PPR.



In the last few weeks, Kind Economy chefs prepared lunch and spoke about their experiences of racism for the SCI event on 'Tackling Hate and Violent Extremism' held at UNISON. Earlier this year, the chefs fed over 500 people in a series of community iftars to support people during Ramadan.

UNISON members are always welcome to get involved. If you'd like to find out more or make links with any of our campaigns, please get in touch on info@pprproject.org.

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. We are represented on the Board by Local Organiser, Nathalie Donnelly.



MCNI has secured further 5year funding for projects including EUSS advice and support, race hate crime advocacy, and a new project supporting 'Community Connections.'

The **financial health and wellbeing advice and outreach project** has been very busy during 2025 addressing issues of debt, poverty, and financial health by providing a culturally sensitive service and improving the awareness of service users of their economic and financial rights. Client work over the year has included assisting with benefits applications, issues and sanctions and liaising with HMRC on behalf of clients on tax.

The **migration justice project** is funded by Justice Together and advocates on behalf of migration justice issues and the detrimental impacts for those subject to immigration control and the hostile environment. The foundation of the project is the lived experience of clients and users of MCNI services and reflects key issues including access to health, housing and education.

MCNI has provided a wide variety of advice and support for vulnerable individuals applying to the **EU settlement scheme**, including sourcing and uploading additional residence documents. The team has signposted individuals to other services including welfare benefits, domestic abuse, hate crime, employment issues, debt, and other immigration services (visa applicants).

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

The **migrant and minority ethnic peacebuilders project** aims to develop the scope for leaders from migrant and ethnic minority backgrounds communities to have a more meaningful and representative role in peace building work in NI. The project has delivered knowledge building, skills development and capacity-building training and has established partnerships and networks with organisations engaged in 'mainstream' peace-building, mediation, education and good relations work.

The new **community connections project** is funded by Peace Plus and is led by GEMS NI in partnership with Migrant Centre NI, Diverse Youth, Belfast City of Sanctuary, Ballynafeigh Community Development Association and Business in the Community.

The project is made up of a number of strands that offer accredited leadership training and recruitment and training of community facilitators who will organise and facilitate activities in 'Welcome Hubs' for minority ethnic communities across Belfast through Belfast City Council Community Centres.



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

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

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

Women's Policy Group NI

Through our participation in this policy network, UNISON has contributed to a number of Government consultations.

- Department of Communities Budget EQIA
- Draft Fuel Poverty Strategy
- Gender Pay Gap Information Regulations
- Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment Scheme
- Department for Infrastructure Budget EQIA
- Department of Education Budget EQIA
- Free School Meals and Uniform Grant Eligibility
- Department of Health Budget EQIA
- Pathways to Work Reforming Benefits and Support Green Paper
- FWS and its implications for NI
- Holiday Hunger Payments
- Anti-Poverty Strategy
- Equality Commission's interim information on the impact of the For Women Scotland case in NI.

We are represented on the stakeholder group for the **Women's Health Listening Exercise**, a collaboration with Derry Well Women and Queen's University Belfast. This research was commissioned by the Department of Health and once published it will inform what should be included in a strategy for addressing women's health needs and improving equality of service access.

We continue to demand that the UK Government include NI women in its action plans for the implementation of **UN Resolution 1325** on women in conflict. Through ICTU, and in partnership with the TUC, we also continue to press the UK Government to ratify **ILO C190** against violence and harassment in the world of work. The NI Executive has already confirmed its agreement to ratification, following extensive lobbying.

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) was a major focus at the ICTU Biennial Delegate Conference 2025. Dr. Jackson Katz delivered the keynote speech of conference, urging men to take their role in challenging VAWG seriously. Motions were passed that called for better policing and justice resources, stronger laws and proper support services that are adequately resourced and funded.

Violence against women and girls stems from deep inequalities, poverty, and a culture of acceptance. While some progress has been made in recent years with the launch of the Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls, this remains a critical issue. Tackling VAWG requires systemic change, robust laws, properly funded services, union-led protections in the workplace, and active cultural leadership from men as well as women.



WORKING IN THE WIDER TRADE UNION MOVEMENT



ICTU

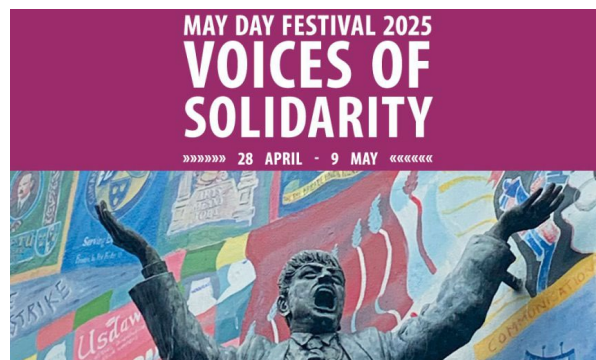
Our main work with other unions continues to be through the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and its Committees, and in the NI-wide public sector negotiating bodies.

Patricia McKeown and John Patrick Clayton were re-elected to the **NI Committee** at NICICTU BDC in Derry in November 2024. John Patrick was also elected as Vice-Chair. UNISON motions focused on Fair funding and addressing priorities in a programme for government; Challenging racism and all forms of hatred and promoting rights and equality for all; and Dealing with the legacy of the past.

At ICTU Biennial Conference in Belfast in July 2025 Patricia McKeown was re-elected and Caitlin Ni Chathail was elected to the **Executive Council** for a 2-year term ending in 2027. Deborah Yapicioz was re-elected to the **Standing Orders Committee**.

UNISON's first motion on Challenging racism was passed unanimously. Our second motion on Genocide in Palestine was composited and is comprehensive, strategic and specific in the demands it makes of the Irish government, the EU and of ICTU itself. It was passed unanimously and encapsulates a total of 16 developments in the policies and actions of these bodies. This is the most comprehensive policy position of any trade union movement in the world on this issue.

The UNISON team represents Congress on a range of groups and we are supporting a variety of ICTU campaigns including those focused on the cost of living; joint union pay; Global Solidarity; as well as campaigns against public sector cuts, stronger employment rights and in support of the Peace Process. Table 14 sets out UNISON involvement in the Congress.



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

Throughout the year, members and activists participated in **ICTU virtual events, seminars and training programmes** on a wide range of trade union priorities. A full UNISON delegation participated in the Global Solidarity Summer School in Newry in August.

The **May Day 'Voice of Solidarity' march and rally** took place in Belfast on 3rd May 2025. Hundreds of UNISON members joined the event that included speeches at Writers' Square and a march through the City Centre. Organised with the Community Arts Partnership and the Belfast and District Trade Union Council, the event featured music, art, family workshops, and market stalls.



Table 16 - UNISON representation on ICTU structures

ICTU Structure and purpose	UNISON representation
ICTU Executive ¹	Patricia McKeown and Caitlín Ní Chathail
NI Committee, ICTU ²	Patricia McKeown and John Patrick Clayton
ICTU Equality & Human Rights Group ³	Patricia McKeown and John Patrick Clayton
NIC ICTU Conference Arrangement Committee and ICTU Standing Orders Committee	Deborah Yapicioz
ICTU Women's Committee ⁴	Danielle McCusker (Vice Chair) and Deborah Yapicioz
ICTU Health Services Committee ⁵	John Patrick Clayton (Chair), Patricia McKeown, Conor McCarthy, Maura McKenna, Jill Weir and Deborah Yapicioz
ICTU Education TU Group ⁶	Susan Neill (Vice Chair), Anne Taggart, Samantha Bronze and John Patrick Clayton
ICTU Public Services Group	RMT, senior lay reps and regional organisers
ICTU Disability Committee ⁷	Pam MacKenzie and Amanda Sweetlove
ICTU Black and Minority Ethnic Committee	Patrick Yu
ICTU LGBT Committee ⁷	Alexis Dickson
ICTU Retired Members	Angela Boorman and Archie Thomson
ICTU Youth Forum ⁷	Ryan Gartland and Jessica McVeigh
ICTU Education Officers Group ⁸	Caitlin Ni Chathail
ICTU Health & Safety Committee ⁷	Susan Neill and Carmen Biagioni
ICTU Solidarity Committee North & South	Susan Neill, Conor McCarthy, Mary Ferris and Kevin Hillick
ICTU Education alliance ⁹	John Patrick Clayton 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 2024 will be distributed at Regional Council.

As a result of a surplus in many regions arising from Covid and the switch to hybrid working, the NEC decided not to allocate lay funds to regions in 2024.

The NI lay account opened at £172,802 and closed at £32,526.71. 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 £3,101 was donated to projects through the following organisations:

- Alzheimer's Society
- Belfast Trades Council - May Day
- Derry Trades Council - Workers' rights & social justice
- Colleen Dance Company
- Belfast City of Sanctuary
- IBCC Events - International Brigade

- CATU - National Housing Demo
- Tar Isteach - Welfare support for branches
- NI Malay Association – Onam Celebration
- RVH & Muckamore branch - Gaza Hill Walk

Regional Committee also affiliated to the following organisations:

- Trade Union Friends of Palestine
- Cuba Solidarity
- HPSS staff side
- Labour Behind the Label
- Nicaragua Solidarity
- Reclaim the Enlightenment
- Centre for Global Education
- International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association (ILGA)
- National Pensioners Convention
- Irish Labour History Society
- Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ)
- International Burma Campaign
- Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign
- Justice for Colombia
- Law Centre
- Linen Hall Library





Branch finance

All branches submitted their Annual Financial Returns on time and within rule. However, a number of branches were put on hold for follow up by the UNISON audit department. As always, full support was available to all branches, many of which took up the offer of assistance.

Branch audits have resumed. 3 NI Branches were audited in October 2024 and 2 more branches were audited in 2025. MOLE, a platform for paying members expenses,

was rolled out to all branches in late August. It will shortly become mandatory and training is available.



Income and RMS

The priority remains to monitor employers to ensure that their payroll systems continue to collect unions subs and that membership applications are processed on a timely basis. The vital role played by the RMS team in progressing our organising campaigns is detailed in Section 1.

Total subscription income returned to Head Office in 2024 increased to £6,327,734. This represents an 11% increase on the previous year (£5,693,653). Total income returned to branches for 2024 was £1,669,472, a 15% increase on the previous year (£1,453,484).



Premises

Galway House, Belfast was fully operational in 2025. We have hosted a number of courses, meetings and events, including external organisations.

The redevelopment work on Galway House, has been approved by the NEC finance and resource management committee with preliminary work scheduled to commence in early 2026.

North West Support Centre, Ebrington: We formally left the Old Church in Derry on 27 May 2025 and moved to temporary accommodation in Ebrington. We expect to permanently move to Ebrington by the end of the year. The premises will be available for local branches and lay meetings and will also host UNISON College NI training and education programmes and events.



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

Work continues to establish paperless offices throughout the union. A substantial number of archived files have been retrieved and scanned to virtual filing.

Email is proving to be the most efficient and effective way of contacting members and is our primary choice for bulk communications. This has the added bonus of reducing our carbon footprint.

We currently hold email addresses for over 88% of our full membership and this remains well above the union-wide average. We also hold mobile numbers for 92% of our full membership. The availability of hybrid meetings has also reduced our carbon footprint.



IT equipment & systems: New lap-tops were rolled out to all staff in April and new printers were fitted in Galway House in June. Merlin, the new digital membership system that replaces WARMS was rolled out to all branches in May and to all staff in July. A new Members Online Expenses portal (M.O.L.E) was rolled out to all branches in August.

UNISON NI Website, Member Engagement Programme and social media: UNISON NI is the pilot region for the roll-out of the new Member Engagement Programme. This includes an overhaul of all the UNISON websites. Our Communications & Digital Engagement Officer Sharrona Clinton is Lead for NI and attends regular meetings with the MEP team and other regional leads on the content and implementation of systems across the new digital platforms.



Welcome to M.O.L.E.

In July 2025 UNISON is preparing to release to all branches an online expenses system for all UNISON members to use – M.O.L.E. (Member's OnLine Expenses)

What does it do?

It provides a one-stop shop for all members to claim their expenses. It is an easy-to-use online portal for entering all your expenses, having them approved by your branch and then having them paid straight into your bank account.

M.O.L.E.'s aim is to streamline the current process making it more efficient, retain records, and expedite payment to members.

Where can I find it?

M.O.L.E. can be accessed online at <https://expenses.olba.org.uk/>

Scan to access M.O.L.E.



facebook Our online presence continues to surpass that of all other trade unions in NI. We have 18,541 followers on our Facebook page – an additional 1,265 new followers since last Regional Council. Since that time our Facebook posts have reached 405,919 accounts. We have also had 15,442 interactions with our posts, and 171,498 direct visits to our Facebook page.

We remain the most followed Facebook page for unions in NI with almost double the following of all other union pages. Our sustained growth indicates the platform's continued effectiveness as our primary digital member communication tool.



Our Instagram page has also been growing, reaching 1,234 followers to the end of August 2025. 40% of our followers on Instagram are 34 years-old or younger, and building resources on that platform remains important for communicating with our increasing younger base.

The page will continue to grow through new campaigns running in the private social care project and the promotion of UNISON College NI.



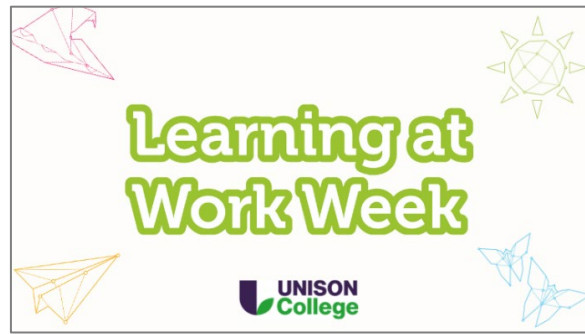
There has been a UNISON-wide move away from X towards Bluesky.

We have recently set up a Bluesky account for UNISON NI which we will use more regularly in the coming year to promote press stories, campaigns and activity in the region.



Social media has also been a particularly useful tool in promoting the upskilling of our membership through UNISON College, including both core activist training and member learning opportunities.

During Learning at Work week in May, we ran a series of social media posts promoting the UNISON College; encouraging Union Learning Rep activity; promoting testimonials from members attending courses; as well as an article about a members journey into nursing through the K102 programme.



Communications Forum: The first meeting of the new UNISON NI Communications Forum took place in June with 19 participants attending from 14 branches. The Forum is for all elected communication officers in branches; anyone in a branch who holds a different branch position but generally takes the lead on communications; or anyone who is active in the branch who has an interest in communications, but who is not yet ready to be a communications officer.

Our mission is for every branch to have a dedicated communications officer and a communications strategy. The Forum will provide an opportunity to share best practice; generate new ideas to communicate with members; and work collectively to tackle communications challenges and progress campaigns. The Forum will meet 3 times a year - in-person and online– with UNISON College providing training when required.

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.



THE UNISON NI STAFF TEAM

Regional Committee records its thanks to the staff team for all their work throughout 2024/2025. During 2025 there have been significant changes to the staff team as a result of retirement, the unfreezing of permanent vacancies, and related permanent and temporary moves within the existing team.

In January 2025, our Head of Bargaining and Representation Anne Speed stepped down from the post. All branches and the staff team enjoyed thanking her for 14 years of outstanding service to UNISON and looked forward to future work with her. In February, we welcomed her successor John Patrick Clayton. Other changes are as follows:.

- Nuala Conlon (RO) retired in May after 25 years service. She had a big party too!
- Kellie Turtle was appointed as Policy Officer.
- Conor McCarthy and Susan Neill were appointed as Regional Organisers.

- Orlaith McCarthy was appointed as Area Organiser.
- Angela Basnett was appointed as SOU Local Organiser.
- Danielle McCusker (AO) was appointed as temporary Regional Organiser until 31 Jan 2026. This is a result of the ongoing extension of our temporary strategic organiser post from SOU in London.
- Jemma Henning (SOU LO) was appointed as temporary Area Organiser until 31 Jan 2026.
- James Large (SOU LO) was extended as temporary SOU Area Organiser until 31 Jan 2026.

Our 6 fixed-term Local Organisers working with branches as part of the BSOF Activity Fund finished in February 2025. A new BSOF Activity Fund project commenced in April 2025 with 7 new temporary LOs working on projects with the 21 supporting branches.

Regional Management Team

- Patricia McKeown - Regional Secretary
- John Patrick Clayton - Head of Bargaining & Representation
- Thomas Mahaffy - Head of Organising & Development
- Anne Speed - Head of Bargaining & Representation (Retired, January 2025).

Administration Team

- Mizanuir Bhuiyan - Cleaner (PT)
- Michele Bradford - Regional Administrator
- Anne Campbell - Team Support
- Conor Johnston - Cleaning & Hospitality
- Grainne Campbell - Receptionist (PT)
- Gemma Curran - Receptionist (PT)
- Shelley King - Secretary (PT)
- Roslyn McCartney - RMS Supervisor
- Jayne Mashal - Secretary
- Alison Meshida - RMS Clerk
- Brenda Peel - RMS Clerk
- Liz Robinson - Senior Secretary

Specialist Teams

- Sharrona Clinton - Communications & Digital Engagement Officer
- Caoimhe McNeill - Policy & Bargaining Support Organiser
- Kellie Turtle - Policy Officer

UNISON College NI Team

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

Organising Team

- Angela Basnett - SOU Local Organiser
- Claire Bolt - Area Organiser
- Nuala Conlon - Regional Organiser (Retired, June 2025)
- Nathalie Donnelly - Local Organiser (PT)
- Jemma Henning - SOU Local Organiser*
- James Large - SOU Local Organiser*
- Conor McCarthy - Regional Organiser
- Orlaith McCarthy - Area Organiser
- Danielle McCusker - Area Organiser**
- Joe McCusker - Regional Organiser
- Susan Neill - Strategic Regional Organiser
- Noreen Robinson - Area Organiser

BSOF Activity Fund (April 2025 to April 2026)

- Hannah Gibson - Activity Fund LO (T)
- Megan Keenan - Activity Fund LO (T)
- Stephanie Kennedy - Activity Fund LO (T)
- Sara McDaid - Activity Fund LO (T)
- Lorna McLarnon - Activity Fund LO (T)
- Caoimhe O'Connell - Activity Fund LO (T)

BSOF Activity Fund (Feb 2024 to Feb 2025)

- Angela Basnett - Activity Fund LO (T)
- Hannah Gibson - Activity Fund LO (T)
- John McCusker - Activity Fund LO (T)
- Sara McDaid - Activity Fund LO (T)
- Helena McLaughlin - Activity Fund LO (T)
- John Henry Parker - Activity Fund LO (T)

*Temp AO to 31 Jan 2026

**Temp RO to 31 Jan 2026



UNION BUILDING
EQUALITY
PARTNERSHIP
PEACE
PARTICIPATION
HUMAN RIGHTS

UNISON

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