

# Proud to be in UNISON

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UNISON national lesbian, gay,  
bisexual and transgender committee

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Annual Report 2015

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#ULGBT15



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This report of UNISON's national lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members committee covers our work from November 2014, following the last annual conference, to the end of September 2015.

Actions on last year's conference decisions and monitoring information are included in a separate document. Please email [out@unison.co.uk](mailto:out@unison.co.uk) for a copy, or write to Carola Towle, UNISON LGBT equality, 130 Euston Road, London NW1 2AY.

UNISON is the UK's largest public service trade union. We have a proud history of working for equality for all. For more information on our work for LGBT equality, visit [unison.org.uk/out](http://unison.org.uk/out).

# Introduction from the co-chairs

It's been a busy year with both positive and disappointing news. After conference last year, we geared ourselves up to fight for a change in government. With a strong message and pledges supporting LGBT equality, our members door-stepped on behalf of LGBT Labour parliamentary candidates, as well as supporting Labour candidates all over Britain. It was with shock and disbelief that we woke up on 8 May to find that we had a majority Conservative government. The only positive note was that UKIP only gained one seat. Following the general election, the Labour party has gone through its own leadership election and throughout the process our members were engaged in the debate. We look forward to the next year and will continue to work through Labour Link to engage our LGBT members and keep LGBT equality on the agenda of the Labour party.

Last year we heard from NatCen on the impact of austerity for LGBT people. The government has continued with their agenda of savage cuts, attacks on our jobs, pay, terms and conditions, culling the services we provide and the services we use. A few weeks before conference, many of us marched under the national LGBT banner with thousands of trade union members and supporters protesting against austerity outside the Tory conference in Manchester.

Many of us also came together to lobby and rally against the Tories' vicious Trade Union Bill on 2 November which undermines our right to organise and to strike, as well as putting public safety and service quality at risk. This government's damaging programme of austerity and attacks on the rights of working people and their unions is a disgrace. We hope that it enthuses and encourages a new generation of people to become active within the union to make sure that we continue to win rights for LGBT members. When we march together, we are unstoppable.

Our LGBT self organised group has continued to have an active role within branches, regions and nationally. Increasingly, our members hold senior branch positions including branch secretary and many are active stewards. We are proud of the diversity of our group and were pleased that our bisexual, transgender, Black and disabled network days were more popular than ever this year. We continue our internationalist perspective: the only response to the increasing globalisation of both employment and LGBT human rights activism.

We were proud to note the number of people with rainbow lanyards that got up to speak at national delegate conference in Glasgow this year - the LGBT group has clearly grown in confidence and visible numbers since the rule change in Glasgow ten years ago.

The LGBT group has many challenges ahead: campaigning against austerity, standing up for our rights as trade unionists, defending the Human Rights Act, informing our members about the EU, challenging the erosion of equality and tackling discrimination in all its forms.

We hope you have an enjoyable conference. There promises to be a lot of interesting debate and the agenda shows that we still have a lot of work to do.

**Louise Ashworth and Darienne Flemington**

# Recruiting and organising

Recruiting and organising – bringing as many workers as possible into the union and encouraging them to be active trade unionists – is always a top priority for UNISON and for our LGBT group. But with public service workers and trade unions under sustained attack from a hostile Tory government, it is not just important. It is urgent.

Employment and workplaces are changing. Increasing numbers are employed casually or temporarily, on local or even individual terms and conditions. Some members' employers seem to change with every season, as contracts are put out, renegotiated and sold on. Branches typically now have members working for scores of employers, many of whom do not have UNISON recognition agreements.

It can be hard to build a strong sense of collective union identity in a workplace with twos and threes of UNISON members and a branch based many miles away.

This is where we come in. Our LGBT group helps us connect with members outside of workplaces. Our visibility at LGBT community events, in campaigns and on social media gives people that sense of being part of something significant. We will never have the buying power of the multinationals who take prime space at the more commercial prides. But we are more nimble and resourceful, seeing opportunities and grabbing them to get our message out: that LGBT public service workers should be in UNISON.

Recruitment is key, but once people are in membership, we need to deliver on what we offered them. Attacks on facility time, coupled with round after round of redundancies and constant reorganisations place local reps under extreme pressure. We must constantly encourage new generations of activists. The role of branch LGBT equality officer or contact is a well-trodden path into activism. We have worked hard to encouraging members to take on the role and support them once in place. We have now trained nearly 100 activists on our annual national course and the 2016 course, which takes place on 10 February in Newcastle, is filling up nicely. We are repeating our drop-in surgery on branch LGBT organisation at LGBT conference and continue to build and promote our resources to support branch organising.



Regional LGBT groups play a very important role in engaging with activists nearer home, as well as driving forward our negotiating and campaigning agendas. As

always, we have very much valued the insight and skills-sharing of the twice yearly meetings of regional LGBT convenors.

It's good to talk face to face when we can, but most of our communications are necessarily electronic and printed. Many thanks to all who have contributed articles and ideas to our newsletter Out in UNISON and information for the monthly LGBT e-bulletin. They are good indicators of the health of our group.

We have also had a very good profile in U magazine, which goes to every one of UNISON's 1.3 million members four times a year, and the monthly activists' magazine InFocus. We exploited the popularity of the film Pride, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the miners' strike featured in the film and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the rule change which brought our LGBT group into being. The first U magazine of the year had a two page spread on our members' role in the history of LGBT equality, to mark LGBT History Month. The February InFocus also carried the story, along with a UNISON LGBT History Month poster. This was complemented by an interactive LGBT history timeline on UNISON's website. The summer U magazine included a short about Penny Smith, co-chair of East Midlands LGBT committee.

The July InFocus dedicated a half page to a London Pride photo and included a picture and quote from Deirdre Costigan, who represented LGBT members at national delegate conference. The September InFocus featured UNISON's support for trans equality, with interviews with Phillippa Scrafton and Dave Merchant, the national trans caucus convenors. We understand that the autumn U magazine will also carry a version of this, with Phillippa on the front cover. Ten years after the rule change to become an LGBT group, we are proud that there is no hidden 'T' in our LGBT!



We hope it is clear that the national LGBT committee very much values our retired members. We've done what we can to support the fledgling LGBT retired members network, including helping to publicise their events. We've encouraged regional groups to involve and support them too, including being proactive about retaining members as they move in to retirement.

Most of our organising and recruitment work continues from year to year. Our objective – building our union – is very clear, but so are the obstacles and challenges. Clear and in some cases deeply rooted in society. Identifying a problem is only the very first step to solving it. One example of this is our work on fair representation. This is a continuing priority for us. Since our group began, we have struggled to involve low paid, part-time and manual workers in fair proportion to their membership of the union. Women's participation at our conference has hovered shy of 50%, while 75% of UNISON members are women.

We have had much more success in building bi and trans participation. The national networks continue to flourish, as do the Black and disabled LGBT networks. We have good relationships with a number of community organisations and events and thanks to GPF funding have had our usual strong presence at Sparkle, Buff, UK Black Pride and BiCon. We are also grateful to the GPF for funding our profile at the first UK LGBT history festival.

It can be easier to demonstrate success when you start a new initiative – when the baseline is zero! Three motions to the 2014 LGBT conference called for the national committee to look at issues around changing language, inclusion and in particular raising awareness of issues for non-binary members. By non-binary people, we mean people who do not identify as solely male or female. They may identify as both, neither or something entirely different.

Although we are at the beginning of this work, there is plenty to report. We have led sessions at the national LGBT committee policy weekend, national women's conference, national women's committee, national trans network meeting and a number of regional groups. We have updated the terminology in our publications and included advice on bargaining issues for non-binary workers.

We have been involved in drawing up national advice on non-binary or gender fluid members and seats reserved for women. There have been a number of items in Out in UNISON and the e-bulletin. We have promoted a UK-wide survey to identify issues facing non-binary people and invited the organisers to present the preliminary findings at our conference in November. One practical step is that title options on UNISON's membership database now include 'Mx'.

The membership database – the RMS - has been a regular agenda item this year, as we have consulted on the introduction of LGBT monitoring of UNISON members. Anonymous monitoring of LGBT participation at national conference and other events has been in place for a number of years. Last year's LGBT conference decided it was time to extend this to our membership records. Thanks to those who fed in to this consultation and who participated in regional and national discussions. It has been a useful exercise and our thinking on how the questions should be worded has changed over the course of it.

The techie stuff is being sorted as we write and the plan is to do a soft launch at LGBT conference. Members will update their own information via their online membership page **My UNISON**. It can also be requested via the phonenumber UNISONDirect. For now, no-one will see the information except the member themselves. The national LGBT officers will receive reports but no identifying information. In time, it will be possible to use the data for mailing purposes, but we expect it to be a while before the data is good enough for that.

There is a nice synchronicity to the launch of LGBT membership monitoring – which we will promote vigorously once it is up and running. It is vital for the future of our union that members keep their details up to date on **My UNISON**, as the Tory government seeks to tie us up in bureaucratic red tape over facility time, collection of membership subs and industrial action.

# Bargaining

LGBT conference set three main negotiating objectives for this year. These were to raise LGBT members' awareness of the importance of collective bargaining; to highlight the role of our LGBT group in building the union strength needed to support successful negotiations; and to make sure LGBT issues – including issues facing non-binary members – remain on the bargaining agenda of UNISON negotiators.

The Tory government and some employers wilfully disregard the proven benefits of collective bargaining with recognised trade unions in terms of good working relations, staff recruitment and retention and the quality of services provided. As casualisation increases, joiners are now coming into UNISON with little experience of these benefits. It is vital that we explain the roots of trade unionism, the meaning of solidarity and the purpose and benefits of collective bargaining.

We have therefore included a number of articles, news items and interviews in Out in UNISON and the e-bulletin on various aspects of collective bargaining. We have given particular attention to collective bargaining outside the mainstream – members who do not come under national collective agreements, in both the private and public sectors.

The other side of this particular coin is making sure the rest of the union is clear about how well our LGBT group can assist with giving members a strong sense of collective union identity when their workplace can be very far from their branch and may not even have a local rep. We need them to be aware of this so that branches and negotiators promote our LGBT group in their own work.

We have highlighted this in our LGBT motions to local government and national delegate conference and also in UNISON's motion to the 2015 TUC LGBT conference. The other motion to local government conference was on pay as an LGBT equality issue – calling on local government negotiators to make sure all claims are equality impact assessed, including their impact on LGBT workers.

For higher education conference, our motions were on zero tolerance of biphobia and on austerity and the living wage. The motion on tackling biphobia noted high levels of workplace discrimination. Yet bisexual workers are often invisible or paid no more than lip service in equality policies and action. It highlighted UNISON's resources on tackling biphobia and called on branches to equality proof their HEI's policies to make sure they specifically challenge biphobia.

The austerity motion noted the increasing numbers of HE workers struggling to make ends meet. It drew attention to UNISON funded research on the impact of austerity on LGBT people and urged regions and branches to involve the self-organised groups in the fight for justice for low paid HE workers.

Our motions to community conference were on LGBT austerity in the sector, noting both UNISON's research and research by London Met University for the TUC on the impact of austerity on the LGBT community and voluntary sector – Staying Alive. The second motion was on organising for equality in the community sector, promoting the importance of self-organisation for building our workplace strength.

One of the LGBT motions to health conference was on tackling LGBT workplace discrimination, calling for questions on trans equality and discrimination to be included

in the regular staff surveys and for national report of results to include the experiences of LGB workers. The other addressed mental health of LGBT workers as a bargaining issue, highlighting the importance of specialist LGBT support and continued funding of such services.

Similar issues were raised by our motions to Energy and Water, Environment and Transport conferences. One focussed on the importance of tackling biphobia and the various resources our LGBT group has developed to support that. The other was on raising the profile of LGBT workplace equality. It noted the strong track record of these service groups in promoting equality at national level, but pointed out that LGBT members can be much less visible at workplace level, and the negative way invisibility impacts on people's work and health. It also highlighted the way some non-union LGBT organisations may seek to work with employers, which may undermine the legitimate role of unions in negotiating on equality and representing members. It called on branches to support local UNISON LGBT organising, signposting the training and resources for branch LGBT contacts and officers.



For our motions to the police and justice conference, one focussed on members in Cafcass whose role is to promote the welfare of children during family court proceedings. Noting the massive cuts in Cafcass budgets, affecting staff numbers and training, it asked the service group to investigate the amount and type of equality training provided, and whether it is up to date on LGBT issues. The second motion noted the deepening cuts to police services, the National Probation Service and the 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies. In the context of these cuts, it welcomed moves to revitalise the Gay Police Association in England as the National LGBT Police Network and the continuing work of LAGIP in probation, both of which have UNISON involvement. It called for specialist equality posts and initiatives across the service group and for continuing engagement with the sectors' equality networks.

We have also pursued long-standing and newer negotiating issues identified by our LGBT group. These including equality in survivor pensions. The current government is unlikely to move on this as a legal issue, but it is still a live negotiating issue with those employers who only give the statutory minimum. We have identified and raised workplace issues for non binary members, updating our negotiating guidance. And we have continued to build a network of members born with DSD/intersex conditions, to develop a shared view of key negotiating issues for them. This is gradual work and we are committed to giving it the time it needs.

Finally, we have used whatever opportunities we can to raise the importance of negotiating for LGBT equality with branches and promote our LGBT bargaining resources, including LGBT History Month, IDAHOBIT, Bi Visibility Day, Trans Day of Remembrance and World AIDS Day.

# Campaigning

As the co-chairs note in their introduction to this report, our campaigning since the last conference has fallen into two distinct phases. Conference charged the national committee, indeed all of us, with doing everything we could to boot out the Tories at the general election in May. We didn't manage that. But all threw themselves into the task and it is important to evaluate the process as well as the final outcome.

There were so many different activities, it is hard to do it justice in summary. LGBT work was very much part of UNISON's overall strategy and we used our LGBT communications and contacts to get messages out about the importance of voter registration, what was at stake, why UKIP was not the answer, and why turnout on the day mattered so much. We ran training in doorstep conversations and hosted (and participated in) phone banks. We liaised with LGBT Labour over the Labour party's LGBT mini-manifesto and publicised the commitments. We used vox pops and video clips of our members talking about why they would be voting. We supported out LGBT Labour candidates and we knocked on many, many doors.

Although it was far from the result we wanted, there were places where we could see how all this activity had made a positive difference. The UK is more polarised than ever, with the Labour vote up in many constituencies where they won. The increase in out LGBT candidates was also noticeable, a good proportion of whom won their seats.

Since the election, the reality of life under a majority Tory government has proved every bit as grim as we feared. Combating their rhetoric around austerity remains a key task. But added to that, we now have to combat their demonisation of trade unions and trade unionists. We have to stop their plans to tie us up in red tape via the Trade Union Bill. The Bill seeks to destroy workplace organisation, frustrate member representation, halt the collection of subs, put an impenetrable thicket of bureaucratic hurdles in the way of any industrial action, and instill fear in workers about striking.

As ever, we are using all our communication channels, everything from twitter to face to face conversations, to get the message out to our members and ensure a visible and well-briefed LGBT presence on the various mass demos, lobbies and other campaign initiatives.



Our broader political education work also continues. UNISON young members have pointed out that some younger people (and indeed some older people) think the battle is won and LGBT equality has been achieved. We are working with them on a charter

setting out the positive changes we still need to see for LGBT equality. This will be presented and developed in one of the conference discussion groups this year.

Knowing something of our history makes a big difference in understanding the present. The film *Pride* has been a great aid in this, and you will see from the regional reports that they have taken every advantage of it. Nationally, we have used the film to introduce our own stories, including how our activists were pivotal in the first trade union and the first Labour party debates on lesbian and gay rights. We are grateful to the GPF for funding UNISON support for the first LGBT History Festival, ensuring UNISON content in that. Festival plans for 2016 are for a more geographically diverse event, with regional hubs. A number of regional LGBT groups have bid for slots.

We have provoked and contributed to a growing debate about putting the politics back into pride. With an ever growing number of prides, the national committee and regional groups have to decide which events have the best potential for us in terms of our aims of recruitment and political engagement. This is by no means always the biggest events, where it can be hard to have the face to face conversations that we need or to influence the organisers. This was a topic for discussion at the second regional LGBT convenors meeting this year, where the North West regional convenors presented the outline of best practice guidance. We are working with them on the final draft, which will include advice on UKIP and pride.

Our campaigning on other issues has not stopped. We are still fighting for equality in survivor pensions, against attacks on welfare, on service delivery issues – including for young people, housing and homelessness, health services and health promotion and education, amongst others, on access to justice, including for those seeking asylum in the UK.

We have fed into UNISON's response to this summer's Parliamentary Inquiry into trans equality – which was called with little notice and just six weeks' consultation period. You will eventually be able read the UNISON submission on the inquiry website, which notes that they have received so many responses that they are publishing them in stages. Email [out@unison.co.uk](mailto:out@unison.co.uk) for an earlier copy.

We are gearing up for the clutch of elections coming up in 2016, including for the Wales and Northern Ireland Assemblies, the Scottish Parliament, English local government, mayoral elections and police and crime commissioners in England and Wales. There is also the promise of referendum on the UK's membership of the EU. Following last year's Euro elections, we are pledged to have a conversation with our members on what's the point of the European Union. We are pleased that South East MEP Anneliese Dodds, who is a member of the European Parliament LGBTI Intergroup, has accepted our invitation to address LGBT conference. She is also participating in the discussion group on why we do international work.

As ever, our strategy includes encouraging our members to consider standing for office, promoting voter registration, pushing the importance of using your vote and publicising respective parties' attitudes to LGBT equality, workers rights, trade union rights and public services. Through Labour Link and in partnership with LGBT Labour, we also work for the election of Labour candidates.

# Internationally

Encouraging an internationalist perspective among LGBT members has been one of the key objectives of our international work for as long as we can remember (and some of us can remember quite a long way back!).

This year, it has been more of a focus than ever. We are aware that while some people have a passion for international issues, others glaze over at its mention. We decided to do what we could to bring the work alive for people. For the Spring issue of Out in UNISON – the one for LGBT history month - we wrote a brief and hopefully interesting history of ILGA, the international LGBTI association to which we are affiliated. From the summer issue onwards, we have introduced a new Guardian pass notes style column.

For the autumn issue, we are working on a pass notes on the EU LGBTI intergroup. Did we mention that the number of initials can be a bit of an issue in making international work engaging?

We have produced a short factsheet on why we do international work – LGBT issues on the international stage. This was on our stall at national delegate conference in the summer, alongside ILGA's annually updated world maps of LGB laws and Transgender Europe TGEU's map of trans laws. It is now on our webpage, has been circulated to regional groups and will be on our stall at LGBT conference.

We have long had a policy of including international issues in every monthly LGBT e-bulletin. This year, we have made an effort to look for more imaginative items, though still with a clear link to UNISON's work programme. One example was a link to the music video produced for Colombo Pride by our co-member of ILGA, Common Ground in Sri Lanka. Who could resist ex-ILGA secretary general Rosanna Flamer-Caldera on a segway?

International LGBT human rights can be linked in people's minds with terrible atrocities – with the idea that any sort of LGBT life is impossible in certain countries. We would never trivialise the terrible discrimination that is rife in far too many countries, in many cases perpetrated by the state. But it is also important to see the joy and the pride in these same lives. This is one of the many things we gain from our participation in ILGA. We have tried to convey it in the coverage of international issues this year.

One of our priority campaigns this year has been to stop TTIP – the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. See the backpage article of the summer Out in UNISON for details of this dodgy trade deal. It was the topic of one of LGBT conference's two motions to this summer's national delegate conference, where it was part of a key timetabled composite motion debate.

TTIP is an all too real example of why international work is vital. If the deal went ahead, it would take much of the power out of our hands as workers and users of public services – it would even take power out of the hands of domestic governments. It's been described – if it goes ahead - as the single greatest transfer of power to global big business. Unions across Europe and the US are working together to stop it.

One of this year's successes is UNISON International Development Fund UIDF's first LGBT project. The Development Fund is money given by UNISON's affinity partners to support the trade union movement in the global south build their capacity and

represent the interests of workers. We have been looking for a potential LGBT project for a while. We were delighted when UNISON international suggested a project building a network of LGBT public service workers in South Africa. The project is being led by Virginia Setshedi, who addressed LGBT conference last year, and is progressing well.



There have also been some giant steps forward in legal rights for trans people. When the UK Gender Recognition Act 2004 was first debated, it seemed like a groundbreaking law. Now laws in Argentina, Denmark, Ireland, Italy and Malta have raised the bar, giving people the right to self-determination of their own gender without any medical or surgical intervention. This is good news for all of us.

We continue to focus our LGBT work on UNISON's international priorities. As well as international trade deals and solidarity with sister unions, this includes migrant workers' rights, Palestine solidarity and justice for Colombia, all of which were also on the LGBT conference agenda last year.

We have encouraged members of our LGBT group to be active in the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) and we have welcomed and promoted UNISON and PSC's pension fund engagement and divestment campaign materials, launched at national delegate conference in June. We have also promoted the No to Pinkwashing campaign, carrying their materials on many of our pride stalls, and ensuring PSC has a presence. 'Pinkwashing' is the cynical use of gay rights to distract from and normalize the settler colonial and apartheid reality that the State of Israel has established in Palestine.

We continue to be active and enthusiastic members of ILGA. UNISON's Darienne Flemington is currently a reserve member of the ILGA-Europe board and we have nominated her to stand for election at this year's conference. She has also been nominated by ILGA affiliates in Lithuania, Greece, Poland, Malta and Slovenia and the Network of European LGBTI Families Associations. This demonstrates the esteem in which both Darienne and UNISON are held by these LGBT groups from across Europe. UNISON has a strong reputation in ILGA for our defence of workers rights (of course!) and our commitment to giving everyone a voice – our diversity policies and practice. We have been asked by the board to present a diversity workshop at this year's conference, which has diversity as one of its main themes, running through the whole event. We have also been the means by which Mike Jackson, one of the founder members of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners, has been invited as a guest speaker. We have no doubt it will be a great event.

We end with the news that for the first time ever, 12 different bodies of the United Nations have issued a joint statement on ending violence and discrimination against LGBTI people, recognising the need to ensure that the rights of LGBTI people are part and parcel of sustainable development. Previously, specific UN bodies, such as the Human Rights Council, have made statements, but this represents a big step forward in the international recognition of LGBTI human rights.

# From the caucuses

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## **Bisexual members**

Following on from our success at last year's conference, when 27 people attended the caucus meetings, we have continued to build on increasing our membership.

We have had a continued presence in Out In UNISON magazine over the year, from photos and articles about bisexuality to photos taken of us at various IDAHO and Bi Visibility Day events.

We had our 2015 network day on Thursday 9 July, which 17 people attended. This is positive as the bi caucus has grown considerably over the past year.

We started off the session with some scenarios in order to tackle biphobia and biphobic comments at work and in meetings. We looked at ways that we can tackle situations and what you as an individual can do if you aren't able to confront the situation directly. We then had a good discussion around this as a group.

We asked people if they had any questions they wanted to ask within a safe environment. Some were specific about how to get to conference if your branch is being unhelpful. Others were a bit broader, about raising the awareness of bi visibility and stamping out stereotypes. It was noted that many people loved the UNISON leaflets about being bi and the definition on them.

We spoke about what we can do for Bi Visibility Day as many of us are isolated. We discussed use of social media for that including building support for a hashtag so more people can get involved. We talked about the possibility of a bi caucus closed group Facebook page and are looking at the feasibility of this.

We had an election for our representative on the UNISON delegation to next year's TUC LGBT conference, which 6 people stood for. Ultimately we elected Jo Beill and others have been nominated for the ballot at conference.

We decided on a theme for the UNISON workshop to be delivered at BiCon. We want to get new people in whilst still maintaining a level of visibility. We decided on a celebration of achievements, the journey of how far we've come in terms of LGBT trade union history, with a bi focus. We successfully delivered this workshop at BiCon in Nottingham this year. This was a good event with many attendees, and lots of audience participation.

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## **Black members**

Throughout 2015, the Black LGBT caucus members have worked collaboratively with the national LGBT committee.

Our representatives on the national Black members committee (NBMC) were Bev Miller and Sophie Whitely. Unfortunately Sophie had to step down from her role on the committee whilst Bev continued. Bev has contributed to committee discussions on various topics and has introduced a Black LGBT perspective on issues raised. Caucus meetings take place before the committee meeting and used to happen end to end. This has been changed so the LGBT caucus meeting is last and there is a ten minute

gap for the previous caucus to vacate the room. Unfortunately, attendance has been sporadic and work is needed to increase LGBT participation on the committee from regions.

Black LGBT members play leading roles in a number of other forums. Dettie Gould and Asha Wolfe-Robinson are UNISON's representatives on the TUC LGBT committee. Bev was elected at last year's LGBT conference as LGBT delegate to Labour Link Forum and the Labour party conference.

We had our usual presence at UK Black Pride in June. Our focus was recruitment and raising awareness of our work within UNISON and the trade union movement. UNISON's stall was visited often during the day. It opened up opportunities for us to network with other unions, community based groups and LGBT organisations. Various members also participated in their local prides.



UNISON's 2015 Black LGBT network day in September was well attended. Jaden reported back from Black members conference 2015. Bev gave feedback on the work of the national Black members committee.

The highlight of the meeting was a Black LGBT asylum seeker, Aderonke, who spoke about her experience of the asylum process that is still ongoing. It was clearly a disturbing experience that has been harrowing for Aderonke. As a consequence of this, we decided to submit an amendment to LGBT conference and a motion to Black members' conference, to highlight the issues that were raised during Aderonke's talk.

We spent part of the day electing to the reserved places on the UNISON delegation to the 2016 TUC LGBT conference and UNISON LGBT conference standing orders committee (SOC). We elected a member to TUC LGBT conference delegation who has not attended before and two people to the SOC. We had a group photograph to round off a very successful.

We are looking forward to the UNISON LGBT conference this November in Brighton and the Black LGBT caucus members will be active in moving motions, amendments and chairing the caucus meeting.

We have enjoyed our year as caucus conveners and welcomed the opportunities to network and share ideas with others to progress our issues throughout what has been an eventful year.

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## Disabled members

Over the past year, caucus representatives have been heavily involved in the work of the national committee as well as on regional and branch levels. They have also been working with the national disabled members committee to ensure that LGBT priorities are included in their work programme.

The annual network day was a success with a focus on why UNISON organises round the social model of disability and changes to Access to Work. These changes can have a massive impact of the ability of our members to stay in work once the cap on their award has been implemented. There is a wider community campaign including a march in London on 26 September 2015.

Work for the upcoming year will continue to mainstream disabled members' voices in the LGBT work plan.

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## Transgender members

Once again, 2015 has been a very active year for the trans caucus. As always, Phillippa was busy representing UNISON, including giving several presentations in and around her region for LGBT History Month – most notably at Newcastle's Discovery Museum speaking on trans workplace issues along with representatives from Newcastle City Council, UNISON Newcastle City Branch and Northern Pride. Dave gave a presentation on trans employment rights to MORF, the group for trans men in Manchester, which used the information in both the Gender Identity guide and the Transgender Workers' Rights fact sheet, and emphasised the role that unions can play in supporting trans people in the workplace.

Regular editorials and appearances by both in 'Out in UNISON' as well as features in 'U Magazine' and 'InFocus' have kept the work of the trans caucus high on the agenda and emphasized positive trans visibility.

Pride season saw our caucus members attending events across the UK. A highlight for the UNISON LGBT SOG was Sparkle and Buff in Manchester. The co-conveners both attended this year to support the regular work of the North West regional group who have this event as a permanent fixture on their calendar – and what they do is exceptional! A huge thank you from the trans caucus to the North West region; the stall, the attendance, your incredible effort and the atmosphere are all brilliant. **Thank you!**

The stall in Sackville Park was very well received, and for the first time there were stalls on both Saturday and Sunday. Whilst Saturday was busier overall in relation to numbers of attendees, Sunday allowed for more in-depth conversation with both current and potential activists, with a number of people expressing a strong interest in joining (or in some cases, re-joining) UNISON. We also presented a workshop in the

LGBT Foundation building on Saturday afternoon on transitioning in the workplace and the work UNISON does for members.

Our network day once again was a great success. Dave was re-elected as co-convenor for the next two years and we saw numbers increase. We had a really positive afternoon looking at key areas of work for us and also discussing motions ahead of conference. A key area of work this year, which will continue in the future, is supporting non-binary identities and ensuring that we have adequate resources to support our non-binary members in the workplace.



Finally, the co-convenors are involved in ensuring our documentation and information is current and fit for purpose, and are working with colleagues to update the Gender Identity guide for UNISON reps which will be completed soon. This booklet is an invaluable aid when supporting members who are trans, and will be updated to ensure that it properly covers issues facing non-binary members also.

All in all a good year for our caucus. Thank you for your continued support, and hope to see as many of you as possible at our conference.

# In the regions

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## Eastern

The regional LGBT priorities were in line with the national union's priorities with particular focus on recruitment and retention of members and raising the profile of the group on a regional basis. As in previous years, open meetings have been held in different parts of the region to try to mitigate geographical barriers.

Members remain very active within the branches and on a regional basis despite diminishing facility time. Due to funding issues, Suffolk Pride did not go ahead this year but a regional presence was at community prides in Norwich, Hertfordshire (Watford) and Essex (Chelmsford). Hopes remain high that Suffolk Pride is able to be held in 2016 and that there will be a return of the Cambridge Pink Picnic. Once again a stall was had at the regional council's AGM in order to provide information and support to senior lay activists from across the region. There is also consideration to attend Bedford River Festival in 2016 with other SOGs in order to go beyond traditional LGBT events.

The committee is made up of 12 people nominated for the AGM with due regard made for the geographical spread with reserved seats for "county reps". This allows committee members to be a point of contact for more local events. There are active members on the regional bodies and in some of the service groups. There remains an active twitter account with daily tweets during LGBT history month and on dates such as IDAHOBiT day and Bi Visibility Day.

A motion was sent to the regional council at the end of last year in order to focus on campaigning against UKIP and trying to prevent UKIP control in local elections.

The regional training weekend was held in Norwich in early October alongside the AGM to decide on priorities for the upcoming year.

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## East Midlands

2015 has been a really exciting and active year for East Midlands LGBT. It has been marked by an influx of new and committed members, fresh and innovative ideas and collaborative working practices. Life in the East Midlands is never dull or stagnant. We have new co-chairs of the group and we welcome Penny and Richard into their new roles. Also we have welcomed Sophie as our regional rep alongside Sean.

Attendance and support of LGBT events has improved with more members taking on responsibilities based on their geographical locations. Social media such as Facebook has been used to great effect to ensure members at grass roots level are aware of forthcoming events. LGBT members have worked hard to promote events within their branches and the response was tremendous! Our focus again this year has been IDAHO and we worked with police authorities, local authorities, health trusts, we built on the strengths and relationships that we formed last year, and had a very successful public rally in Nottingham with over 150 people attending.

We promoted lunch and learn sessions and offered a learning space for people to learn more about equality issues, had lunchtime lectures on LGBT issues, published articles

in branch newsletters and held wide-scale recruitment drives, promotional stalls and even held a pub quiz to raise funds for an LGBT charity.



We have found that district councils often lack a clear sense of direction in developing LGBT agendas and themes. To assist in redressing this balance, we have recently set up an LGBT forum, drawn from members of the community and supported by both UNISON and the council. The group held its first AGM in September and is already helping to shape and inform that council's LGBT agenda as well as to provide support for LGBT people locally.

As stated earlier our focus has been around campaigning for facility time for equality work as well as working with our regional champions to disseminate information to our region. We continue to work closely with our LGBT colleagues in our branches to form a network that is effective. We are now much more visible in our communities and are promoting our work in a much wider arena, meeting members and promoting our work with members of the public.

We have worked hard since last year's conference to reach out to and engage with new group members. Of particular note, we have implemented LGBT champions embedded within each county. Branches have invited champions to attend their meetings and to brief on current activity. The champions have been instrumental in providing a conduit of communication between East Midlands region and grass roots membership, significantly raising the profile of LGBT issues at branch level.

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## **Cymru/Wales**

We are glad to report that attendance and participation in our regional LGBT group has increased and due to this we have been able to increase our voice within the region both at regional events and meetings.

This has been a busy year again for the Cymru/Wales region. Representatives from the region have attended many events throughout the year including the many pride events throughout Wales. At these events the region has attempted to recruit new members and raise awareness of LGBT specific issues and the union's role in helping us to achieve in certain areas of equality.

Another successful regional policy weekend was held in March which included some training and discussions around the motions from last year's LGBT conference.

We have a busy few months ahead of us as a region specifically in regards to the Welsh Assembly elections in May, in which we hope to return a Welsh Labour Assembly Government.

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## **Greater London**

Although there have again been some challenges for the group this year, we continue to prioritise UNISON's key campaigns in the region and to focus on recruiting and organising LGBT members.

At our policy day in February we agreed our priorities for the year and held a detailed planning session on mobilising members in the run up to the election in May.

We continue to be actively involved in the work of the region, and send representatives to regional committees. We held a Parliamentary reception in January for LGBT UNISON members and their guests, organised in partnership with the regional Labour Link committee and hosted by Stephen Twigg MP. Although arranged at short notice, it was a success, with 45 members and guests registering to attend. The event was held to celebrate LGBT History Month and the contribution that LGBT members have made to the Labour movement, and aimed at mobilising LGBT people to become involved in campaigning with Labour candidates in the run up to the election. Stephen was the first openly gay man to be elected to the House of Commons and is well remembered for his victory over Michael Portillo in the 1997 general election in Enfield in north London.

We have continued to maintain a regular regional LGBT eBulletin and have reactivated the dormant regional committee Twitter account so as to increase our presence on social media.

We held our annual Organising and Training Day at the UNISON Centre in April. It was again open to branch equality officers and other branch officers who have a role in relation to equality as well as to LGBT members, and was attended by 35 activists from across the region.

The day included an address by Nicola Field from Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners, a session led by Carola Towle on setting up branch LGBT groups, workshops on 'UKIP and the LGBT vote' (led by Jean Geldart from Hope not Hate), LGBT Back to Basics (led by Carola), 'Got a Queery? An introduction to queer identities, experience and language', and 'LGBT on the international stage'. We also had an LGBT Quiz on the Commonwealth, and the day concluded with a session on recruiting LGBT members.

Our recruitment activities this year included running a stall with general recruitment, LGBT, and 'register to vote' material at the Women of the World festival in March. This large festival has been held at the South Bank around International Women's Day for the last few years. We were the only trade union stall and we hope to be able to cover the whole of the 3 day event next year.

The major recruitment opportunity in the region was London Pride, which was again followed by the UK Black Pride/Picnic in the Park event the next day. We held our traditional pre-pride breakfast in Regents Park before joining the march with our regional banner and new regional group T-shirts and vests. Group volunteers helped staff the UNISON stalls at both events.

For Pride, we worked to encourage LGBT and non-LGBT members to attend and branches to take part in the UNISON contingent with their branch banners. We were very pleased that there was a good response to this, with at least 6 London branches (3 with banners) having delegations on the march.

In addition to sending a delegate to ILGA Europe conference in Athens, we have continued our very active support for the No to Pinkwashing group.

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## Northern

2015 has seen our group become bigger than it has for a number of years; we are additionally now seeing our branches asking for LGBT information for their branch stalls to use for recruitment, giving the group greater visibility. Below are just some of the things the group has achieved and been involved in during 2015.

February was LGBT history month and there were a number of events in the region that the group had a presence at. The main event was in Sunderland at a day arranged by Stonham housing group. We delivered a presentation on the work of UNISON and the LGBT committee. This proved to be an ideal recruitment opportunity. We also organised an event at a bar in the region and a number of branches ran events in the form of stalls with fun filled activities in their workplaces.

In April we held our policy and training event in Middlesbrough. It was attended by 17 activists from branches around the region, many of whom were new to the union and who have since become active in the group. The weekend was very productive and we came up with ideas for motions to LGBT conference. Louise Baldock, a Labour MEP candidate, took time out from her busy schedule to attend as a guest speaker which was followed by a workshop on political activity. We also had a presentation on UNISON's international work and a workshop on negotiation skills.



Pride season was busy this year. Durham Pride was the first ever pride parade to be held in Durham under the slogan 'Keep Calm and Pride On'. Festivities began with an all-inclusive pride parade which was led by a brass band. Newcastle Pride 2015 was an amazing 3 day event that yet again increased in the number of visitors attending, this year seeing over 71,000! The Northern LGBT group were there represented on the march and also at a stall recruiting new members and promoting the work of the group within the region. And finally Sunderland Pride saw thousands of people turning out for the celebrations where again we had a stall for recruitment and information purposes.

Durham Miners' Gala was also supported by the regional LGBT group who took part in the parade and had a stall at the event.

The UNISON young members Northern region group and UNISON's Newcastle University branch held a joint meeting with a free screening of the film *Pride*. Robert Etherington attended as a guest speaker from the Northern regional LGBT group to highlight the benefits of being part of a trade union, and also to emphasise the achievements made to LGBT people's rights in the workplace by unions. Robert was able to give input as he attended the 1984 and 85 pride events. The event was very well attended and was a very good opportunity for UNISON recruiting young members.

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## **Northern Ireland**

Our priorities this year were to continue to raise the profile of transgender issues, increase visibility in workplaces and maintain links with the wider LGBT community

As part of Transgender Day of Remembrance we hosted the documentary "Becoming Chaz" in our Derry office and attended a transgender rights event at Stormont organised by Focus Trust.

We hosted a workshop on gender variant young people as part of International Week Against Homophobia and Transphobia in May but offered through our main Continuing Professional Development programme. This targeted predominantly health and education professionals.

The Health Agencies branch provided some sponsorship for the Gender Essence Arts Festival which was a photographic and installation exhibit in Belfast City Hall in July.

In September, we facilitated a very successful networking event of almost all of the local trans/non binary groups to promote a greater understanding between the groups and explore opportunities for more collaborative working. UNISON was regarded as a neutral ally and was in a unique position to support this.

We set up LGBT info stalls in July and August across 14 hospital sites. We ran these in partnership with the Health and Social Care LGBT Staff Forum and distributed posters and over 1000 rainbow lanyards to staff as well promoting local pride events. These were supported by the local branches and LGBT members in each location. Several health trusts arranged photographers for inclusion in their staff magazines and intranets.

UNISON members were involved in the development of guidelines for LGB patients and transgender patients produced by the Northern Ireland Royal College of GPs and launched in May. Part of the guidelines is to display the Health and Social Care LGBT poster in every GP practice.

UNISON LGBT financially supported the Outburst Arts Festival and Pride as well as running events and participating in each of the three Pride festivals. We held stalls at Pride and our banners were at the launch of Outburst. In addition we sponsored a Belfast Pride Award at a ceremony which was held at Belfast City Hall with over 500 people. The Community Voluntary Sector branch organised a fund raising disco for Foyle Pride and raised over £300.

We supported the Rainbow Project to deliver sexual orientation awareness training by providing venues in local Health Trusts and promoted in our main Continuing Professional Development programme.

Our ebulletin actively promote LGBT events which local organisations are running as well as research requests, good practice guidelines, interesting media articles and contacts for LGBT groups throughout Northern Ireland.

In January one of the DUP MLAs proposed a conscience clause which would exempt organisations, businesses and individuals from equality legislation which protected LGBT people. UNISON responded to the consultation as well as taking part in demonstrations against the clause.

UNISON members turned out in great numbers for the march for marriage equality rallies held in Belfast and Derry organised by ICTU, Amnesty International and the Rainbow Project. We also participated on a panel discussion on marriage equality organised by Amnesty as part of Belfast Pride.

UNISON publicised our response to the then Health Minister Jim Wells' outrageous remarks about LGBT people and children.

We sent out nine LGB&T ebulletins as well as two postal mailings to members who are on our list. Our circulation list has increased by 10% and we encourage reps who meet members who identify as LGB&T to get onto our list to support them to stay engaged. We have 406 likes on our facebook page. UNISON LGB&T events are also all promoted on the main UNISON Northern Ireland facebook page.

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## **North West**

The North West LGBT Group came back from our successful conference which was held for the second consecutive year in our region with renewed energy, particularly having left with the annual national recruitment and organising award. Also ringing in our ears was the very positive feedback from the conference and the work that the group put into helping with local organisation and the social. As usual the committee met immediately after to start planning on how we would take forward the conference motions as part of this year's annual work plan.

The year started with great news that our General Political Fund bid had been successful laying the groundwork for another busy year for our group.

We have had one of our busiest years attending and participating in more Pride events and marches than ever before, from our large pride events such as Manchester, Liverpool, Blackpool and Sparkle to small community based events such as Oldham Pride, Tameside Pride and Peel Park Pink Picnic which are family inclusive event. We were over the moon to win the award for the best overall float at the Manchester Pride Parade; it was a great privilege to win this award which has never been won by a trade union before. This of course generated a lot of publicity for the union in general and for the LGBT SOG. It was the result of hard work and planning by the group working together with local community groups as well as Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners.

We were again incredibly pleased to be able to enlist the support of so many members and branches. We are particularly delighted to be working with the team of organisers

working to deliver Bolton's first pride event at which we will have a strong presence. We were however saddened to hear that Liverpool Pride had to scale back its plans but we responded with support including from local branches to help ensure a successful pride took place in the city including the 'Pride at the Pictures' lorry showing the best of LGBT cinema and screening our UNISON advertisement before each film.

We continued our work with BUFF the national trans masculine event, held during the Sparkle weekend, helping them to raise over £1000 for the MORF Binder Scheme.

At a national level we have been working with other national LGBT committee reps to take forward the work plan. As result of our success in the recruitment and organising awards we were proud to have been asked to develop some guidance for future applicants.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the regional LGBT group members, regional staff and our national officers for all of their support throughout the year.

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## **Scotland**

Our committee is made up of 5 male and 5 female members and again, all sectors are represented. We are elected at our AGM which takes place in October. We meet four times a year. All of our members are active branch stewards and we ensure all equality issues are mainstreamed in our branches and on the local, regional and national bodies we sit on. We fill all the reserved LGBT seats on regional committees such as International, Learning & Organising and Communications & Campaigns.

Recruitment has again been our biggest priority this year and we attended pride in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Pride Glasgow this year was held over two days and as well as taking part in the march, we had a stall for the duration.

We attended the STUC LGBT Workers Conference in May which was very well attended. This is the fourth annual conference and it is growing in size each year. There was a wide range of motions and the debates were lively. We submitted two motions which were passed. There were excellent guest speakers and an interesting range of workshops to attend. We now have two representatives on the STUC LGBT Steering Committee.

Some branches have approached us for help in setting up local LGBT self-organised groups. We organised the first meeting which was open to all members to attend. Whilst not particularly well-attended, we hope to continue with these meetings.

This year we were invited to be a sponsor at the first ever LGBTI awards hosted by the Equality Network. This is being held in Glasgow on 10<sup>th</sup> September and looks to be a very exciting event. There will be 150 guests reflecting the broad range of awards on offer, from LGBTI student and staff groups to politicians, the media, representatives of business and individuals from across Scotland and beyond.

We will be presenting an award, have a presence on the judging panel and will have a stall at the event. This will be a unique opportunity to showcase UNISON and our commitment to equality to leaders from the social and political arena and to the media and wider public.

Four delegates from the committee will be attending the ILGA Europe conference in Athens in October.

## **South East**

UNISON South East LGBT has maintained a large presence for a small group.

Emily Brothers – Labour parliamentary candidate for Sutton and Cheam, who came third in the general election, and Labour’s first transgender Westminster candidate - spoke at our AGM in January. Emily was an inspirational speaker – blind and recently publicly came out in Pink News as transsexual. Emily told us how 10,000 people petitioned against the Sun that ran a column stating ‘how could Emily know she was transsexual if she was blind’. Our very own Carola Towle – national LGBT officer - then spoke on all things UNISON LGBT.

In February as part of LGBT History Month, the group joined an MP’s reception with Tristram Hunt MP, who is campaigning against anti-LGBT bullying in schools.

Since our well attended AGM this year we have followed through by engaging with our members and the larger public within and outside UNISON. We have a small committee and the group elected representatives to the main regional committees, making sure that LGBT issues have a voice in regional policy and activity.

The regional group attended and funded this year’s prides throughout the region, on the parades and running a UNISON stall at Oxford and Reading prides and joining the parade at Kent Pride (Margate).

At Portsmouth Pride, Portsmouth local government branch joined the parade and ran a UNISON stall, and at Brighton Pride, Lewes Local Government Branch had a ‘big bus’ UNISON float. In recognition of their work, both these branch LGBT groups have been nominated for this year’s organising and best photo awards.

The regional group is affiliated to ILGA, the international LGBTI association, East Kent LGBT Network, UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group (UKLGIG) and Broken Rainbow.

We publicise our activity by regular emails to signed up UNISON members and through the South East UNISON website. By these methods we hope to reengage with members in the South East and ensure that every part of LGBT is active in our group and in what we do.

The housing crisis that the LGBT community face is central to our campaigning and we are tabling a motion on the housing crisis faced by LGBT members at this year’s UNISON national LGBT conference. We also have a motion on survivor pensions to end the LGBT discrimination in public sector pensions.

The group successfully campaigned against UKIP, in the run up to the general election, throughout the region. We also joined forces with the successful ‘Stand up to UKIP’ campaign ensuring that Nigel Farage was not elected in South Thanet – East Kent.

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## **South West**

This has been a busy year for LGBT activists in the South West. In the run up to the general election our activists were out and about supporting Labour parliamentary candidates. In the months that followed, we organised, contributed to and celebrated at twelve pride events and two diversity festivals. Despite dwindling numbers at our meetings, activists around the region have tirelessly sustained our objectives regarding

capacity building, 'UNISON' brand raising awareness and recruitment and engagement with under-represented groups.

We regularly send information out to all 96 branches using existing publicity materials. This included the invitation to the open meeting for members born with Intersex conditions as well as reminders for our members who identify in the LGBT caucus groups of the network days. The new bi and trans leaflets have been visible and well received at all our events. An important part of the South West committee's work is to continue being Out, Loud and Proud in all six counties of our region. We continue working with UNISON young members, LGBT Labour and the local Labour constituency parties. We have had good support from members of the other SOG groups as well as several branches volunteering with us and for us, to swell UNISON visibility.

The regional LGBT website has been redesigned and has updated information regarding contact details and relevant links to the national website. Our facebook page goes from strength to strength with our 'likes' creeping up. A problem that remains is the practice of gate keeping – less than half the branches in the South West have sent members to a SOG conference in recent years. Self organisation is the life blood of our union and we are determined to promote this empowering concept whenever we can.

We actively participate on all regional committees. A number of LGBT activists hold branch officer posts and we now have representatives from all service groups except WET. We took part in a SOG forum at the regional women's conference highlighting the continued need for LGBT self-organisation, and ran a workshop on international solidarity initiatives.

The regional group remains affiliated to ILGA. We continue to ask for donations in exchange for lanyards and ILGA maps in order to give financial support for ILGA's scholarship programme and Diversity fund. This is a vital part of our work around solidarity with other LGBT groups. We used the various pride and equality events as a platform to highlight whole UNISON campaigns, to recruit under-represented groups, and to raise awareness around LGBT inequality around the world, including handing out the postcards highlighting 'No Pride in Israeli Apartheid'.

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## **West Midlands**

Yet again, the past year has been very busy for the West Midlands SOG. We have welcomed Claire to our regional team, and thank Luke and Katrina for their commitment to our union, as they will be stepping down this year from National Committee.

As previous in years, we have attended prides across our region. At this year's Birmingham Pride, UNISON helped organise the trade union block, with over 250 members from 15 unions leading the parade through the city streets. At Stoke on Trent Pride, we were joined by the local branch, holding a joint stall. We attended Walsall and Wolverhampton prides; also in our region Coventry City branch SOG supported its city pride.

In February we supported a school outreach programme, to coincide with LGBT history month, and plan a similar event this coming year in Bromsgrove. For the first time our

SOG has sent a delegate to BiCon, and hope this can become a regular fixture within our regional calendar.

Our conveners continue to play a active role in our region, attending regional council and committee. We try to foster links with other SOGs, forums and committees. Earlier in the year Bob and Rory took the National LGBT banner to Burford in Oxfordshire, taking part in the Levellers Day events.

Over the last 12 months at least 5 branch SOGs have been formed, and our regional SOG is developing into an “umbrella” group, sharing ideas and supporting members and LGBT officers.

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## **Yorkshire and Humberside**

Once again this year for the Yorkshire/Humber region has been very slow. The first meeting of the cycle of meetings after the AGM was well attended but again things went downhill from then on with low attendance and cancelled training events.

This regional group did intend to have a float in Leeds Pride but due to circumstances beyond our control the float was not available.

On a more positive note the SOG did have a presence at Wakefield Pride where UNISON was one of the sponsors of the event and also at Hull Pride.

There will also be a regional presence at Barnsley Pride which takes place on the 6 September. It is difficult to ascertain if we were successful in any of our recruitment campaigns at these pride events. Recruiting new members into the self organised group or into the union is a difficult job at the best of times. The group has not had any recruitment initiatives that have been targeted at Black, disabled, and young LGBT workers and bi and trans workers, just campaigns to recruit members into UNISON per se.

The regional SOG does not have any caucuses and does not use social media.

The regional group has not implemented any of the conference decisions from the last year as its main priority has been to try and rebuild the SOG. This is difficult work but we are making slow progress.

The regional group is represented on the Yorkshire/Humber regional committee, regional council and at regional service groups.

The main problem for the group is committed attendance. We seem to start well but as the year goes on attendance levels fall thus leading to cancelled meetings and training events. Our aim this year is to continue to rebuild the SOG and have committee members attending all meetings this year so that none are cancelled.

The next meeting of the regional SOG will be the AGM on the 7 November 2015.

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