

UNISON's first 20 golden years

Deirdre Costigan and Phillippa Scrafton,
national LGBT committee co-chairs

UNISON was born 20 years ago this July. From the beginning, we had a strong focus on self-organisation. The first edition of Out in UNISON appeared in January 1994, making this our 50th golden jubilee edition.

Our tradition of self-organisation built on years of hard work by lesbian and gay members in our predecessor unions NALGO, NUPE and COHSE. We still have members who went to the groundbreaking NALGO lesbian and gay conference in a children's nursery in Camden 30 years ago.

We've grown and changed, most significantly with our transition to a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members group in 2005. Although hard won at the time, this has added immeasurably to our organising, negotiating and campaigning strength.

The first edition of Out in UNISON looked forward, over-optimistically as it turned out, to a vote in the House of Commons to equalise the age of consent. In fact we had to wait until 1998 for this, under the newly elected Labour government.

We are in a similar situation in 2013, looking forward to equal marriage but aware that, without continued pressure, this could slip from our grasp or be unnecessarily delayed.

But back in 1994 many never dreamed we could come so far. We have won the scrapping of Section 28; the removal of outdated offences such as gross indecency; the inclusion of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia as hate crimes and the banning of discrimination at work and in service provision.

We have gained new rights and protections including the right to gender recognition; the duty on public bodies to promote LGBT equality; immigration and asylum rights; parenting, partnership, pensions and family rights.

LGBT people are much more visible now – across society, at work and in our union. In 1994, UNISON's first NEC had no out LGBT members. Now we have a gay woman in the presidential team, LGBT people in leading roles on the NEC, national service groups, regions; scores

of branch secretaries and nearly 200 branch LGBT officers.

In 1994 we lived in a country blighted by unemployment and a Conservative government at war with working people. So perhaps not much has changed after all.

But the social changes we have seen since then, the change we have been involved in as LGBT trade unionists, prove that we must never give up the fight. We have made change happen. And we can do it again.

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Branch LGBT officer training

In April, we piloted training for branch LGBT officers at the UNISON centre in London. Attended by over 30 activists, the resounding conclusion was that it had been a very useful (and enjoyable) day.

Report of the day

Lesley Holme,
Suffolk police staff

Having completed my second year on the branch committee, I felt it was time to set up LGBT and women's self-organised groups (SOGs) within our branch. With that in mind, I booked myself onto the pilot of the LGBT branch officer course.

If it was not for UNISON, I would have felt the trip alone into the heart of London a little daunting but I was welcomed in the usual inclusive UNISON fashion. In the last four years I have attended a number of training events, work

and UNISON related. On this occasion, my expectations and needs were more than met, in fact this was one of the best to date.

The skills and knowledge of the trainers teased information from the participants, making us realise what a SOG is all about. Getting a group of like-minded people together helped us identify information and skills we already have but did not know we had. The group sessions were rich with ideas to share.

A well facilitated day meant debriefing sessions from group work were of good quality. I also found what I have called the mid-session bulletins from the trainers

important. The course book, supporting papers and information pack were comprehensive but concise and informative.

The closing comments were that we wished it had gone on longer as we enjoyed it so much. This is a huge compliment to those running the course and we thank you.

Those who attended from my region are now working together to set up SOGs in our respective branches, assisted by a regional officer. Our enthusiasm unleashed and our confidence growing, we continue our UNISON work having grasped what this is all about – a modern, current and forward-thinking union.



Regional training materials

Participants drew up a list of the required tasks, skills and knowledge and the support on offer for being a branch LGBT officer. The course materials are available for regions to put on the training. We'll be running the course again nationally early next year. For more information email out@unison.co.uk.

Confidentiality and visibility: getting the balance right

By Danny Whitehead, LGBT officer, Humberside police branch

In the past, my workplace's LGBT network was very poorly attended and barely functioning. Because of confidentiality, emails around the network just said a group name, which wasn't very welcoming.

We decided to ask people who were comfortable with being out to the rest of the network if they would be happy to have their work email shown. Although some aren't comfortable with this and no one has to, a few people agreed.

This move has really helped the network: people can see who else is a part of it. Before, people wondered who else might be there if they came to a meeting.



As a direct result, social nights have better attendance, as do the network meetings”



Now people are car sharing and arranging to go for a meal or a drink before and afterwards.

The workplace LGBT intranet site now has some photos of network members so there is a friendly face. It gives a much more personal feel.

As a direct result, social nights have better attendance, as do the network meetings.

As I said, all of this is for people who are comfortable with being out to the rest of the network and, for pictures, the rest of the company. Others can still have complete confidentiality.

UNISON LGBT conference

22–24 November

Liverpool

Deadline for motions: 2 August

Delegate registration closes 27 September

More at unison.org.uk/out



UNISON's first out trans chair

In January, Phillippa Scrafton was elected as the first out trans chair of UNISON's national LGBT committee. LGBT committee member Carrie Pearson-Loughlin found out how it was for her.

How did you become active in UNISON?

When I first started at the council, in 1989, it was the done thing to join a union. My workplace wasn't a closed shop but it was extremely unionised: I worked in waste management. Shortly after I joined we went on strike and I remember immediately wanting to become more active so I became a steward. I loved the sense of belonging and camaraderie.

What made you get involved with the regional LGBT group?

It was still a lesbian and gay group then. I was just about to transition and hadn't told a soul I was doing it. I was terrified. I was worried about my job – I really believed as soon as I told my employer I was

about to transition they would sack me. I wanted some level of support to safeguard my job and to talk to someone about my concerns.

You are the first ever trans woman to hold the position of chair on national LGBT committee? What drove you to stand for the chair?

When I started on national committee I was worried I wasn't clever enough to be on it. I admired them all greatly. After about two years I made myself a promise that I would be chair one day. I have always aspired to it. I really never did believe I would be good enough. I hold my position in the highest esteem and it really is the pinnacle of my UNISON career. I can't tell you how proud I was when my peers voted me in as chair and I want to do my utmost for them.

What do you hope to achieve in the coming year as chair?

I hope that my term as chair brings trans issues to the wider audience. If people have a greater understanding of transphobia and an awareness of what it means to be a trans person, I have achieved what I set out to do. Gender identity and sexuality are very different. I cannot hide as a trans woman: gender is such a diverse rainbow.

How have you found it so far?

Incredibly exhausting! It is exciting, challenging, difficult, rewarding... I never believed there was so much to do. I take my hat off to my predecessors. I love it. I have given myself a challenge and I am revelling in it!

A Living Wage for all

By Anu Prashar, LGBT committee and Oxfordshire UNISON

What is the Living Wage?

The Living Wage is different from the minimum wage. The minimum wage is the hourly rate that almost all workers are entitled to as dictated by law. The current adult rate is £6.19 per hour.

The national Living Wage of £7.45 an hour (£8.55 in London) takes into account the area-specific cost of living and the basic expenses of supporting a family. Melanie says: "It's a better reflection of the real cost of living and, unlike the national minimum wage, it doesn't have discriminatory lower rates for young people and apprentices."

The case for the Living Wage

Besides the fact that the living wage protects our members from poverty pay, it also makes economic sense. The think tank IPPR found that replacing the national minimum wage with the Living Wage would save employers and government over £2bn a year as a result of paying out less in benefits and receiving more in income tax and national insurance.



As a low-paid LGBT worker, it's often hard to make ends meet. The minimum wage is simply not enough. It's time that employers paid all their staff a Living Wage."

Melanie from Wales

What is UNISON doing?

UNISON branches up and down the country have been persuading employers to implement the Living Wage. So far, 11 Labour controlled local authorities have become fully accredited Living Wage employers for both employees and contractors, as have employers in higher education, the NHS and the private sector.

Jackie, an LGBT member at Lambeth council, says "Our branch has been pushing this for some years. Initially council officers said it couldn't be done, so we're very pleased that the council has now adopted this policy. It has only been applied to some contracts so far, but we'll keep pushing."

The Scottish government has agreed to implement it for all their staff and has urged employers in the private, public and third sectors to follow suit. David, an LGBT member at Glasgow City Council, said: "We have successfully negotiated the implementation of the Glasgow Living Wage, now £7.50 an hour. This is a great baseline for all employers and something to build upon."

Minimum Wage vs. Living Wage

	Minimum wage / hour	Living wage / hour
Apprentices	£2.65	
Under 18	£3.68	£7.45
Between 18 and 20	£4.98	(£8.55 in London)
21 and over	£6.19	

What can you do?

There is a wealth of information on how to start your campaign on the UNISON website including how to make your case and a campaign checklist: alivingwage.co.uk

From cradle to grave

By Louise Ashworth, LGBT committee and disabled members caucus

In April this year, while Tories paid homage to their former leader, I shed a tear for the passing of the welfare state (1942–2013), conceived by Labour and brought to an untimely death by the legacy of Thatcherism and the cruelty of Conservatives.

Cuts have pushed the most disadvantaged into increased poverty: controversial capability assessments by Atos; harsh eligibility criteria for Employment and Support Allowance; benefit increases limited to the consumer price index meaning real cuts of 4% over three years, child benefit frozen, maternity grants now just for the first child, tax credits reduced, abolition of educational maintenance allowance, the severe sanctions regime leaving some people without benefits for six months.

And then there's the bedroom tax: social housing tenants charged for 'under occupancy'. The shortage of smaller properties means tenants have the dilemma of struggling to pay the shortfall or looking for private accommodation with poor security and conditions. The last minute concession for foster carers only applies if you have fostered or been approved in the past year. Disabled people unable to share a bedroom or who need a room for equipment or adaptations can, at best, claim a discretionary payment for the shortfall – and this is not guaranteed.

It's a further blow for young LGBT people wanting to escape hostile family. It follows hard on the heels of the restriction for under-35s to an allowance equivalent to a room

in shared housing, leaving those in self-contained accommodation (the preferred choice of many young LGBT people fearful of prejudice from sharers) with a shortfall. This is at a time when AKT Outpost, which supports young LGBT people at risk of homelessness, reports a 30% increase in demand for its services across the country.

Trying to get additional help is ever more difficult. Crisis loans, for when there are issues with benefits, and budgeting loans have been replaced by short-term benefit advances. Instead of crisis loans for general living expenses and community care grants, many local authorities now give vouchers or food parcels.

Personal Independence Payments (PIP) are replacing Disability Living Allowance (DLA). Assessment criteria don't guarantee consistency, with people at the mercy of subjective judgements carried out by contractors like Atos and Capita. DLA case law was slowly moving towards a more flexible and social model of disability. PIP puts us back: the DWP expects 600,000 to come off DLA.

Now we're seeing the introduction of Universal Credit. The Tories say they want to make work pay. We know what is needed is decent, full-time jobs that pay a Living Wage with decent terms and conditions.

And if that is not enough to grieve for, from December 2018 the pension age goes up to 66 and then 67 between 2026/8 – eventually circa 73. Old age and poverty – no benefits and no gold-plated pensions.

What can you do?

Inform our members

UNISON information sheets about the changes tell members how to be prepared, where to go for help and how UNISON is responding.

Campaign for the Living Wage

UNISON strongly believes that the growth in the dependency on working tax credits is largely due to the growth in low-wage and zero hour contracts. A reformed welfare system must recognise the need for a Living Wage – see our article on page 5.

Support front-line workers

UNISON is lobbying for extra funding for front-line services implementing and affected by the changes and for a review of the impact on local services.

Raise your concern

Write to your MP (see theyworkforyou.com) expressing concerns about the benefits cap, lack of affordable or appropriate housing, lack of clear discretionary housing payment criteria or sufficient funds.

Publicise UNISON's charity There For You

Make sure our members know about the help There For You can provide – financial assistance, debt advice, wellbeing breaks and a new service working with credit unions to offer fair loans to members

- Find out more about There for You at unison.org.uk/welfare
- Information and help on universal credit and benefits turn2us.org.uk
- Online advice and local advice in England and Wales from Citizens Advice at citizensadvice.org.uk

Can you help make a difference?



By Carl Phillips, national LGBT committee and branch welfare officer

Have you thought about supporting There for You, UNISON's unique charity supporting our members? The charity is over 100 years old, having grown from its beginnings as the benevolent and orphans fund in Bolton to today's national professional registered charity. As branch welfare officers, we are there to help our members when times are hard.

And times are hard. NEC member Sue Highton, chair of the board of trustees, reports that demands on the union's charity are soaring as a direct result of government 'austerity' policies. She said: "The state of the economy and the attack on benefits is having a massive impact on our members. Many are really struggling financially. We are here to help our members when they need us

– including our LGBT members. We need you to let them know."

The charity helps in a number of ways, locally or through the welfare case team at UNISON Centre. Support is tailored to individual members' needs: someone to talk to, financial assistance, debt advice or wellbeing breaks.

The debt advice service found that many members were using payday loans, getting caught by massive interest rates and spiralling debt. In response, they are working with credit unions across the UK so that members can borrow money at reasonable interest rates from ethical and responsible lenders. Credit unions are financial co-operatives owned and run for the benefit of their members.

When I was asked to represent my regional LGBT group on our regional welfare committee I thought it was about fundraising and the softer side of branch life like sending cards and flowers to members who were ill. Welfare is so much more than that. I'm working with local partners: I've set up links with the local welfare rights organisations and food banks. I've found it both challenging and rewarding.

Not all branches currently have a branch welfare officer. Could you be that person? There's online training followed by face to face training; your regional welfare committee is always on hand to offer guidance and support.

Please support UNISON's charity – and remember it's There for You! unison.org.uk/welfare



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for you

supporting UNISON members
when life gets tough

Celebrating bisexual visibility

Sarah Shahid, bi caucus convenor, in conversation with **Asha Wolfe-Robinson**

Sarah Hi Asha – I know you started off in UNISON’s young members, but since your 2009 interview for Out in UNISON, what have you been up to?

Asha Since my last profiling in Out in UNISON (which makes me feel like some sort of media starlet!), I have become branch secretary. First I took it on as a job share. It’s taken me almost a year to feel like I know what I’m doing! I am currently vice chair of my regional Black members group, co-convenor of the regional LGBT group and regional rep on the national committee. Lots of plate spinning!

Sarah Congratulations on being the first person to fill the new bi members seat on the TUC LGBT committee. How did you feel when you found out?

Asha UNISON was behind the call for reserved seats on the TUC LGBT committee for bi members – there were already

seats reserved for Black, disabled, trans and young members. So I was proud to be nominated by UNISON. I like networking with people from other unions. It reminds me that issues in the public sector aren’t commonplace for other activists.

Sarah I went to BiCon for the first time last year and enjoyed meeting other like-minded people. Your Bi’s of Colour workshop was a highlight. It was informal and thought provoking at the same time. How did you get involved with Bi’s of Colour?

Asha Accidentally! I knew one of the co-founders, Jacqueline Appleby. It’s really important that those of us who have multiple ‘identities’ have spaces to talk about similar experiences.

Sarah What advice do you have for other LGBT members wanting to get involved in their branch, including young members?

Asha It depends how active you want to be. For some people, it’s easier just to contribute to the regional LGBT group, especially if they don’t have a group in their branch or aren’t out at work. Other people love case work or health and safety or welfare. It’s about finding what you are best at and enjoy most.

Sarah One of our bi caucus motions to last year’s LGBT conference called on people to use Bi Visibility Day on 23 September to raise bi equality issues at work. What plans do you have for the day?

Asha September seems really far off at the moment but I know it will creep up quickly. I will be looking to see if there is a local event and if not – I’ll help organise one!

Sarah Great talking to you, Asha. I’m looking forward to seeing you and other bi activists at BiCon and then at our own bi members network meeting on 25 July.



BiCon

18-21 July, Edinburgh
bicon2013.org.uk

UNISON bi members network meeting

25 July, UNISON Centre
London – see page 10

Bi’s of Colour

bisofcolour.tumblr.com

Bi visibility day – 23 September

facebook.com/bivisibility

Negotiating equality: don't be scared

By Rebecca Nicole Williams, housing convenor, Haringey UNISON

My colleagues finally met me properly on International Transgender Day of Remembrance, 20 November 2012. By the Friday most were simply used to the new girl known as Nikki. I'm telling my story because it's important to me that others can see, that with a bit of thought and a bit of luck, this could happen for them too.

Since that day my life has been surreal, exhausting and electrifying. I always knew I'd transition eventually but never thought it would be now. I very much doubt anyone's ever really ready for it. My closest friends have known about Rebecca Nicole in some form or other for 20 years, but coming out at work is a risky and complicated step. I'm secure in my true identity, but I wasn't born yesterday.

I started in retail, a real culture shock coming from my arty education background. Retail is problematic to unionise and access to trade union support can be difficult to find. When I moved to a sector that gave unions proper recognition, I joined UNISON.

Once, at another employment, I talked with my manager about transitioning in the workplace. She quizzed me and explained that she didn't "have a problem" but "others might be a bit funny about it". She told my team. I was let go the first chance they got.

Homes for Haringey (HfH) was the right place to come out. The

feminine intuition I used to second guess told me so, and this time it's all been very different. I've been a shop steward since 2011 and management have worked with my branch of UNISON from the start to ensure that transgender rights in the workplace are recognised, understood and upheld. Everyone has been as supportive as anyone like me could hope for.

HfH asked me to lead in how they informed colleagues and are very clear to them on the organisational duty of care. But more than that they have looked out for me with real care, and never simply go for minimal legal compliance. A draft trans-specific policy and procedures are being finalised, and concerns are always addressed, such as travelling from site to site safely while adjusting to my own visibility.

Looking at all the issues that can arise when someone transitions, concerns from all parties are thoroughly examined, discussed and resolved. As a UNISON member I am fully supported by legal advice from UNISON's employment rights unit.

The night before the big day I had slightly chilly feet. Donna Whitbread of My Transsexual Summer appeared on the Victoria Line right in front of me. I remembered the importance of our visibility, showing we are out there and not alone. Six months on, each day is still scary, but it is worth it. Since our restructure at work some people have only ever known me as Nikki. Most others don't recognise the old me on the rare occasions it appears.

You don't have to be scared – make your future what you want it to be.



My closest friends have known about Rebecca Nicole in some form or other for 20 years, but coming out at work is a risky and complicated step.”



Out in UNISON meets

Tef Asante, Bromley LG UNISON



Hi Tef – tell us a little about yourself

I've had a number of jobs over the years and I'm a long-time union member. Back in the 1980s, I was in the NHS and a member of COHSE. I spent seven years working for the Association of Cinematograph Television and Allied Technicians union (now part of BECTU). I've also done a lot of work in the community. I lived a short distance from where Stephen Lawrence was murdered and worked with many others to rebuild the community.

What was your first contact with UNISON's LGBT group?

The first contact was at London Pride when I was handed a UNISON travel card wallet. I wasn't eligible for membership then, but I held onto it. As soon as I started work in the public sector, I joined UNISON. Then

at 2011 London Pride, activists on the UNISON stall encouraged me to come to the Black LGBT members' network meeting. I turned up with an open mind and the members were welcoming and supportive. This instilled confidence in me to do more.

So what did you do?

Shortly after, I changed jobs and was welcomed into my new branch. I became a workplace rep and am training to be a steward. I'd really like to be a union learning rep. I'm passionate about lifelong learning – in particular, learning differences and the barriers within the workplace.

What are you doing now?

I recently went to the regional Black members recruitment and organising day. It was great to hear other

members' experiences and pick up effective strategies. I work for a charity that promotes and delivers mental health services. There are a lot of bank workers who may not be in a union. This is where I aim to channel my ideas and energy.

So what next?

Equality is my passion. I've always challenged injustice. I made a conscious decision to join UNISON, because I know that UNISON can make a difference. Now I have over a million voices behind me! I'm getting more and more active in my branch. My next national event will be the Black LGBT members network meeting in September.

Any advice to someone thinking about attending one of the LGBT network meetings?

There's no pressure to throw yourself in at the deep end – even though you'll be well supported. You can gain inspiration and tap into a wealth of expertise from other members... so just do it!

LGBT network meetings

UNISON organises annual open meetings for:

- bi members – morning of 25 July
- trans members – afternoon of 25 July
- Black LGBT members – 13 September
- disabled LGBT members – 14 September.

Why not come along!

Travel costs met nationally. Contact out@unison.co.uk to find out more.

No strings attached

By Polly Jones, UNISON international officer

Aid has always been given with strings attached. Most well known is the policy of giving aid to poor countries as long as they spent it to buy equipment and services from British companies. It is also used to influence policy-making.

For example, in 2005, the UK Department for International Development gave £274,000 to Adam Smith International for a pop video promoting water privatisation in Tanzania. The video's lyrics claimed "Our old industries are dry like crops and privatisation brings the rain" (google Tanzania Water Privatisation Pop Video to see for yourself). In fact privatisation did not give more people access to water or improve pipe work. Indeed water quality got worse.

Not only have conditions on aid skewed priorities away from those that governments and their citizens would choose, they are very demanding to administer. Tanzania estimated that it had to account for 20,000 different performance criteria a year, to more than 50 different donors. Many African finance ministers expect to spend three days a week liaising with donors.

UNISON campaigns against conditions on aid, arguing for long-term predictable aid commitments. Aid must support governments in delivering their own priorities and tasks, including the provision of public services.

UNISON's solidarity work with sister trade unions around the world informs us about their

successes and the challenges they face. We use this evidence to lobby our government on international development. Through UNISON's International Development Fund, many public service trade unions have strengthened their own lobbying so they can hold their governments to account directly.

In 2011, David Cameron threatened to withhold aid from governments unless they decriminalised homosexuality. UNISON is proud of its record in LGBT equality campaigning. In an international context we must always seek advice from our sister trade unions and LGBT activists. They have said in no uncertain terms that such aid conditionality is not helpful. In fact it undermines their work and puts them at risk.

There is already a problem with homosexuality being portrayed as a western import and LGBT rights the result of western influence, at odds with domestic values and traditions. Linking LGBT rights to aid feeds this false notion, and can lead to LGBT people being scapegoated, exacerbating intolerance and hate. If the UK government is serious about LGBT rights, it must listen to LGBT activists in the global south.

If the UK is serious about tackling poverty and inequality, aid has only a minor role. What would make a real difference is ensuring more resources reach the global south, free from strings; closing tax havens to stop transnational corporations diverting tax revenue

from the south; recognising that nascent manufacturing industries should be protected; and cancelling third world debt owed to the UK and the World Bank.

For more information

jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk
taxjustice.net

Wanting more?

Out in UNISON is only published three times a year, but you can get monthly updates direct to your inbox by signing up for our LGBT e-bulletin at unison.org.uk/out

Contact us

For more information about your regional LGBT groups or to join UNISON please call 0845 355 0845.

Minicom 0800 0 967 968.

Lines open from 6am to midnight, Monday – Friday and 9am to 4pm Saturday

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