

# YOUNG MEMBERS CONFERENCE 2023



## HIGHLIGHTS



### LONDON MOTION PASSED!

Our motion “Young Member Focused Training on Strikes and Ballots” encouraged some passionate speeches from across the regions and was passed.



### GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Conference was a chance to get to know other young members from London as well as networking with delegates from other regions at workshops and socials.



### VISITING NEWCASTLE

We had a great time exploring Newcastle in our spare time, trying out the food and experiencing the nightlife.

# CHAIR'S REPORT

Kieran Paterson – Chair, UNISON Greater London Young Members

It was not only the first Young Members Conference for the majority of our region's delegates, but also our first UNISON conference at all! The atmosphere across the weekend in Newcastle was very welcoming, and I would strongly recommend this conference to anyone who has not attended any conferences before.

I attended as a national delegate from the Greater London Region, and so I spent much of my time split between regional, national, and equality group meetings. I won't give a full run-down of the entire conference, as I know much of it has been covered by many of my other colleagues, but I will talk about some of my favourite moments.

For me the highlight of the conference was hearing from members of the Confederation of Public Employees' Unions (KESK), one of the four major trade unions in Turkey. Aysun Önal started this section by giving an inspiring speech on the conference floor.

Aysun spoke about KESK's work, aims, and history; then moving on to tell us about the oppression faced by both trade unions, and the Kurdish people, at the hands of Erdogan's government. This part of the speech was particularly moving, and Aysun spoke passionately about the links between British trade unions and the global labour movement.

The speech was followed by a short Q&A with Aysun and Osman Işçi. Some delegates asked about how best we could support KESK from the UK, and I asked both Aysun and Osman if they would consider working with us on a motion for next year's conference, a joint campaign, and/or another Q&A session with our members who were not able to attend conference. I have since been in touch with Osman, and we will keep everyone updated with how this progresses!

It is undeniable that many of the motions submitted to this conference were deemed non-competent by the Standing Orders Committee. Many delegates expressed their disappointment with this result, and these concerns were shared by many in the national forum meetings too. The Standing Orders Committee themselves also shared their concerns about the number of disallowed motions, and agreed that this issue should be looked into further. Some suggestions were made by delegates such as providing clearer information, training, and support for motion writing in advance of next year's conference. I hope that these considerations will be taken seriously and actions will be taken forward into the future. It is important that Young Members feel they are able to enact change through their conference, and we must be given the best possible chance of producing more competent motions for the agenda.

Every motion that made it onto the agenda was passed on the floor, with various speakers providing their support for the different regions' submissions. Our Greater London Region motion, 'Young Member Focused Training on Strikes and Ballots', received an enormous amount of support from the floor and in the national forum meetings. Two motions from the agenda will be taken to the UNISON National Delegate Conference next year. The National Young Members Forum Committee voted to recommend our motion as one of these motions. This was subject to an open vote from all delegates at the conference, we have yet to receive the results of this vote so we will keep you updated, but in any case I think all of us should be really proud of this achievement. Special thanks go to Josh for moving our motion on the floor with a clear and well-delivered speech, and to Tahreen for looking after us all during the weekend!

There are certainly exciting things on the horizon for next year, and once we all return from the holidays I am sure that there will be much to get on with. As always if you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

Thank you to everyone reading this for your contributions to our region's Forum, it is always appreciated and we really value the time everyone puts in. Keep safe and have fun during the holiday period, see you in 2024, bliadhna mhath ùr!







## WHAT DO OUR REGIONAL DELEGATES SAY?

Aside from the main conference sessions, there were equality groups meetings for LGBT+, Black, Women and Disabled members, plus a choice of workshops to attend on the topics of intergenerational solidarity, trans allyship, climate emergency, labour link, organising regional young members forums, misogyny, pensions and Palestine.

Attending the 'How to be a good trans ally' workshop brought the concerted attack against transgender people in the media to the forefront of my understanding, locating it as part of an attack on bodily autonomy affecting everyone and demonstrating the importance of our union's loud and visible support for trans rights as well as interpersonal acts of support.

At the 'UNISON's international work – focus on Palestine' workshop, the union's support for the Palestine Solidarity Campaign was highlighted, as well as question of how we in UNISON can respond to the call from Palestinian trade unions to end complicity with those involved in implementing Israel's siege, with the awareness that the UK government are trying to pass the 'Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill' which I understand is essentially seeking to outlaw Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions actions by public sector organisations. This useful UNISON guide on talking about Palestinian rights was also mentioned which I'd recommend a read.

I really enjoyed meeting and getting to know fellow young members from the London region and beyond.

Outside of the official conference schedule we hung out and saw some of the city, with plenty of chatting, eating, laughing etc. We have a lot of shared ideas and experiences but also a lot to learn from and develop with each other. There's much for us to do to build on the motions passed and discussions had to create a proactive, organised and member-led youth wing of the union with the power to transform our workplaces and society, but I'm looking forward to being part of it.

**CAITLIN, MOORFIELDS EYE HOSPITAL BRANCH**

For me, one of the best things about conference was meeting other young workers from all the regions of the UK and seeing the common cause between us. It is empowering to know that your branch is not alone in the struggles in faces in the workplace, but that hundreds of thousands of people across the country, and beyond, are fighting the same fights.

To that end, hearing from the Turkish-Kurdish union, KESK, and learning how much they value our international solidarity, was inspiring. I also enjoyed the talks from some of Unison's leading figures. Their stories gave me a sense of the wider history of the union and the Labour movement that provides useful context for today. And, of course, the real best bit about conference was taking part in democratic policy-making, even if the motions were mostly uncontroversial.

**JOSH, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON BRANCH**

# MOTION: YOUNG MEMBER FOCUSED TRAINING ON STRIKES AND BALLOTS

In October 2022 Christina McAnea warned that UNISON-led strikes in 2023 could represent the largest strike by NHS workers since the early 1980s. More recently, UNISON posted a news update on the 5th of July this year titled “[the] Government should commit to NHS pay talks now to avoid possible strikes next year.” Many Young Members (YMs) were balloted within their workplace branches for the first time in their lives.

It is our opinion that a level of knowledge is often assumed within branches about the mechanisms and results of balloting and strike action. Some YMs have pointed to a lack of available and promoted information about these topics as part of the reason behind abstaining in strike ballots. This will, in our view, inevitably affect the turn-out for these votes, and potentially prevent thresholds being met either way.

Some YMs have also expressed concern about a lack of understanding about employment rights while taking strike action. Particular areas of concern were highlighted around how their jobs and pay would be protected during and after any participation in a strike.

Both of these factors combined may have led some YMs to feel unable to vote in these ballots, in part due to a lack of available information which was accessible to them and specific to their concerns. YMs want to make informed choices when they receive these ballots, knowing their rights and expectations if action is passed.

With this in mind, and the potential for further strikes in the future, we propose that the National Young Members Forum should resolve to:

1. Liaise with Learning & Organising to organise workshops for YMs with the purpose of providing knowledge about: how strike action is decided upon and balloted for; how structures within UNISON operate and coordinate more generally, and what UNISON members’ legal rights are whilst taking part in strike action.
2. Liaise with Learning & Organising to develop consistently available learning materials on the topics mentioned above.
3. Promote YMs’ and Regional Young Member’s Forums involvement in local branches and committees’ future balloting campaigns, to encourage appropriate information to be distributed with YMs in mind during these times.
4. Run an engagement campaign with potential YMs, who may or may not currently be UNISON members, to inform them of the topics mentioned above.
5. Survey YMs on:
  - The level of knowledge they feel they have on the topics mentioned above.
  - The support they felt they received from their local branch and regional committees whilst the most recent balloting processes and strikes were ongoing.
  - How this may be improved, if required, in the future.