

**"EQUALITIES AT THE  
HEART OF  
EVERYTHING WE  
DO..."**

UNISON Activists from across the region got together in Newcastle this weekend for our annual equalities event. This year, as in previous years attendance was high with representation from all of our Self Organised Groups as well as across the service groups. It was also great to meet several first time attendees to the event, reassurance perhaps that the equalities message is at the heart of everything we do!

A comprehensive programme had been planned for the weekend, led by **Ruth Berkley** from UNISON regional office ably supported by lay activists from the S.O.G Committee's and Co-Chairs.

We began with a short 'ice breaker' exercise to get us all involved then on to our aims for the weekend. Then a regional perspective on equalities from UNISON Regional Deputy Convenor, **Kenny Bell**.

Kenny spoke with great pride and passion about the work members and activists in the region have done and are doing around equalities. From anti-fascist and anti-racism work with organisations such as Show Racism The Red Card and Hope Not Hate to branch activities such as a the Migrant Workers

Project being done in North of Tyne Mental Health Trust.

As a pilot region for UNISON's Equality Reps project Kenny spoke about how branches are now demonstrating the equalities agenda is at the heart of our negotiating with employers. Changes to service delivery and terms and conditions are now being challenged more and more with tools such as Equality Impact Assessment's, ensuring that the needs of our members are considered before decisions are taken.

Kenny then talked a little about what work is still to do and suggested ideas how to move forward with the equalities agenda, with perhaps a short workshop being made available at our Regional Conference....we shall see!!! There then followed a short question and answering session before a welcome coffee break.

....And it's not even Lunch Time!!!



**Delegates listen as Deputy Regional Convenor, Kenny Bell addresses the event**

# The Single Equality Bill

## An Update from Thompsons Solicitors

To end the morning session of our first day we had a presentation from **Iain Birrell** from **Thompsons Solicitors** giving us an update to the Single Equality Bill currently making it's way through the House of Lords.

The aim of the bill is to replace the nine major pieces of discrimination legislation, over 1000 statutory instruments setting out rules and regulations and more than over 2,500 pages of guidance and statutory codes of practice with a single Act which will form the basis of straightforward practical guidance for employers, service providers and public bodies.

During his presentation Iain attempted to update us with what is 'likely' to be in the final Bill should it succeed. I say this because the Bill only has till the end of this current parliament to make it into law. As I have pointed out it is still in the House of Lords before returning to the House of Commons ... all before the General Election.

**Detailed below is a breakdown of the key changes:**

**Part 1:** Imposes a duty on certain public bodies to have due regard to socio-economic considerations in making strategic decisions.

**Part 2 (including schedule 1):** Establishes the key concepts on which the Bill is based including:

- The characteristics which are protected (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- The definitions of direct discrimination (including because of a combination of two relevant protected characteristics), discrimination arising from disability, indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation. These key concepts are then applied in the subsequent Parts of the Bill.

**Part 3 (including Schedules 2 and 3):** Makes it unlawful to discriminate against, harass or victimise a person when providing a service (which includes the provision of goods or facilities) or when exercising a public function.

**Part 4 (including schedules 4 and 5):** Makes it unlawful for education bodies to discriminate against, harass or victimise when disposing of (for example, by selling or letting) or managing premises.

**Part 5 (including schedules 6,7,8 and 9):** Makes it unlawful to discriminate against, harass or victimise a person at work or in employment services. Also contains provisions relating to equal pay between men and women; pregnancy and maternity pay; provisions making it unlawful for an employment contract to prevent an employee disclosing his or her pay to a colleague; and a power to require private sector employers to publish gender pay gap information.

**Part 6 (including schedules 10,11,12,13 and 14):** Makes it unlawful for education bodies to discriminate against, harass or victimise a school pupil or student or applicant for a place.

**Part 7 (including schedules 15 and 16):** Makes it unlawful for associations (for example, private clubs and political organisations to discriminate against, harass or victimise members, associates or guests.

**Part 8:** Prohibits other forms of conduct, including discriminating against or harassing of an ex-employee or ex-pupil. Also determines the liability of employers and principles in relation to the conduct of their employees or agents.

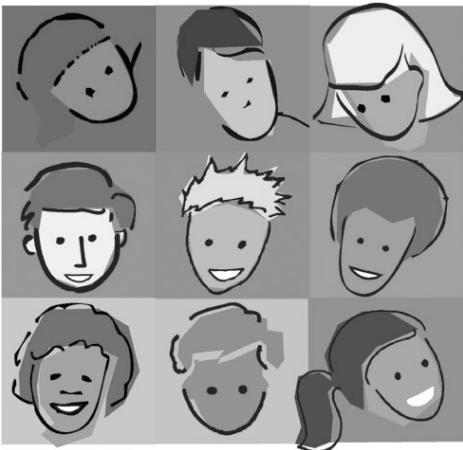
**Part 9 (including schedule 17):** Deals with enforcement of the Bill's provisions, through the civil courts and employment tribunals.

**Part 10:** Makes terms in contracts, collective agreements or rules of undertakings unenforceable or void if they result in unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation.

**Part 11 (including schedule 18 and 19):** Establishes a general duty on public authorities to have due regard, when carrying out their functions, to the

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need: to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation; to advance equality of opportunity; and to foster good relations. Also contains provisions which enable an employer or service provider or other organisation to take positive action to overcome or minimise a disadvantage arising from people possessing particular protected characteristics.

**Part 12 (including schedule 20):** Requires taxis, other private hire vehicles, public service vehicles to be

accessible to disabled people and to allow them to travel in reasonable comfort.

**Part 13 (including schedule 21):** Deals with consent to make reasonable adjustments to premises and improvements to let dwelling houses.

**Part 14 (including schedule 22 and 23):** Establishes exceptions to the prohibitions in the earlier parts of the Bill in relation to a range of conduct, including action required by an

enactment; protection of women; educational appointments; national security; the provision of benefits by charities and sporting competitions.

**Part 15 (including schedules 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28):** Contains a power for a Minister of the Crown to harmonise certain provision in the Bill with changes required to comply with EU obligations.



## HOW DO WE SELF-ORGANISE?...

One of UNISON's great strengths is the way members can self organise. No other union provides this opportunity to its members. Because of this UNISON is at the forefront of equalities campaigning at branch, regional and national level.

Our Self Organised Groups (S.O.G) are LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender), Women, Black Members and Disabled Members. Each S.O.G has it's own National Committee structure and conference. In addition a work programme in any given year decided at conference by members.

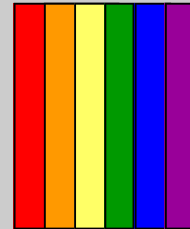
UNISON members can work within any of the self organised group or groups with which they identify, campaigning on issues, working to aid members and improve working conditions. The work of the self organised groups is vitally important and new members are always welcome . One of the activities this weekend was to consider in small groups how we would set up a S.O.G for LGBT members in a branch. The activity meant we had to consider what specific needs, if any LGBT members would need. For example location and time of the meeting to ensure confidentiality to those members not 'out' to work colleagues.

This was a really effective exercise in getting members to consider issues they would not normally have considered, and a further example of working together.

### *Did you know.....*

February is Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender History Month - a celebration of the lives and achievements of the diverse LGBT community.

Many UNISON branch and regional groups are organising events and there is a UNISON poster in our February magazine InFocus. Branches are urged to use the month to publicise UNISON's work for LGBT equality and recruit LGBT members into the union.



More information, including details of events and resources, at [www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk](http://www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk)

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## A Northern TUC Perspective of Equalities

Kevin Rowan, Regional Secretary of the NTUC gave a presentation over the weekend to update delegates as to what activities and campaigns are taking place in the region. UNISON's Northern Region has for a long time played a major role in the work of the NTUC and it was good to hear of the joint working being done. Work around disability, anti-fascism and anti racism campaigning including numerous Hope Not Hate events, working with organisations such as Equalities NE. Campaigning against the far right and extreme political parties. The NTUC has a commitment to a number of ongoing

campaigns to promote equality and diversity and to challenge discrimination in the workplace. They are working to increase representation of women in public bodies with key events such as International Women's Day and 'Reclaim the Night'. They are also working to increase and improve the participation of under represented groups, as well as engagement and activities to tackle poverty, including child poverty in the workplace and in the community; an issue many of our members are all too aware of here in our region.

Kevin finished his presentation with a call for more to be done in some areas, particularly around LGBT and a number of LGBT delegates have suggested a way forward to develop even further the strong bond already formed between UNISON and the Northern TUC.



## UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

In January 2008 the Government announced that it would provide a Social Care Reform Grant over 3 years worth £520 million as part of an adult care “concordat” to support the “transformation” of care systems. The transformation is to move to personalisation in local authority social care provision—sometime know and Self Direct Support (SDS) to enable the role out of personal budgets. In addition this is now being extended to the Health Sector with all but Acute services affected. There are eight pilots in Health in the Region.

This is a major change in the policy direction and provision of social care which UNISON has to respond to. Local Authorities are focusing on the roll-out of various forms of “cash for care” direct payments, personal budgets and individual budgets. This shift in the way care is organised and paid for will have huge implications for UNISON’s organising and bargaining agenda. Further information is available from our website [www.unison.org.uk/northern](http://www.unison.org.uk/northern) or contact your branch Equalities Officer.

add  
yours

A Million Voices Campaign  
...In our Region.

add  
yours

The weekend concluded with an empowering address from our **Regional Convenor, Clare Williams** about UNISON's 'Million Voices' Campaign and what it means for activists and members here in our region.

Beginning with presenting the three strands, **Social Justice, Good Jobs and Quality Public Services** Clare went on to discuss at length how best to take the campaign forward using the positive message of “*What UNISON members are for, not what we are against!*” The million voices campaign is an ideal opportunity to raise our own manifesto as an independent trade union opposed to 'Slash and burn policies'. Clare highlighted a number of equalities issues including the startling fact that unemployment amongst BME (black and minority ethnic) communities is up to over 14%.

In her speech, Clare described how the 'million voices' campaign provided activists an ideal opportunity for recruitment within the equalities strands, and that the equalities weekend was an excellent example of how the work activists here in our region can feed into the national campaign to support our black, disabled, LGBT and women members.

In closing Clare called on Equality Reps and activists to continue their hard work and to develop further then communication networks that are currently being forged across the region.

All that remained was a to wish everyone a safe journey home, after a very effective and positive weekend .....**Well Done All!!!**