

From lone voices to collective union action for LGBT equality

Our journey towards an inclusive LGBT group with a focus on organising, campaigning and recruitment that is recognised across the union

Early years

Our story begins in the early 1970s, with individuals and some trade union branches. The three trade unions (COHSE, NUPE and NALGO) that later came together to form UNISON were early adopters of lesbian and gay rights, defending members facing discrimination and campaigning on lesbian and gay equality issues

By the early 1980s, meetings of lesbian and gay members were well established in NALGO. So when the 1983 NALGO annual conference was held in the Isle of Man, where male homosexuality was still completely criminalised, we were well placed to protest.

This gave the impetus to the first officially endorsed lesbian and gay conference in a UK union, held in October 1983 in North London

Some other unions also began to support lesbian and gay workers, and in 1985, the Trades Union Congress adopted a lesbian and gay rights policy

An inclusive union

In 1993, UNISON was formed. Lesbian and gay organising was enshrined in UNISON's rules from the start. So was a rule book commitment to fair representation in all UNISON structures and activities. From the start, the UNISON lesbian and gay committee had 6 reserved seats for Black lesbians and gay men, and 6 for disabled lesbians and gay men, elected at national network meetings of those groups.

There was increasing discussion about the remit of the group as lesbian and gay and after a period of reflection and discussion within the group, it was agreed to propose a rule change to UNISON national conference to replace the lesbian and gay group with an LGBT group.

This was agreed at UNISON conference in 2005, and we've worked hard to make sure that change was not just the addition of two letters to our name

2017

Our national LGBT conference takes place every year, attended by hundreds of UNISON LGBT members. We debate issues facing us as LGBT workers and trades unionists and help direct UNISON's work for LGBT equality.

We hold annual meetings for Black LGBT, disabled LGBT, bi and trans members to network, identify issues and discuss proposals for national LGBT conference. There are reserved seats for representatives of Black, disabled, bi and Trans members on the national LGBT committee

Each of UNISON's 12 regions has an LGBT group. They have regular meetings, organise training for activists, elect representatives to UNISON national LGBT committee and play an active part in all the union's work in the region.

Our publications include negotiating and bargaining advice for branches on LGB workers' rights, Trans workers' rights, factsheets on biphobia, intersex equality and non-binary inclusion, and a guide for trade union representatives supporting trans members.

UNISON was founded with a strong internationalist perspective, and the UNISON LGBT group never forget that we are part of a global labour movement and a global LGBT movement.