

November 13-14
Guildhall, Derry

BDC24

SOLIDARITY

STRENGTH

SUCCESS

Workers Making
Change Happen

REPORT

STRONGER TOGETHER
CONGRESS
Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Northern Ireland Committee







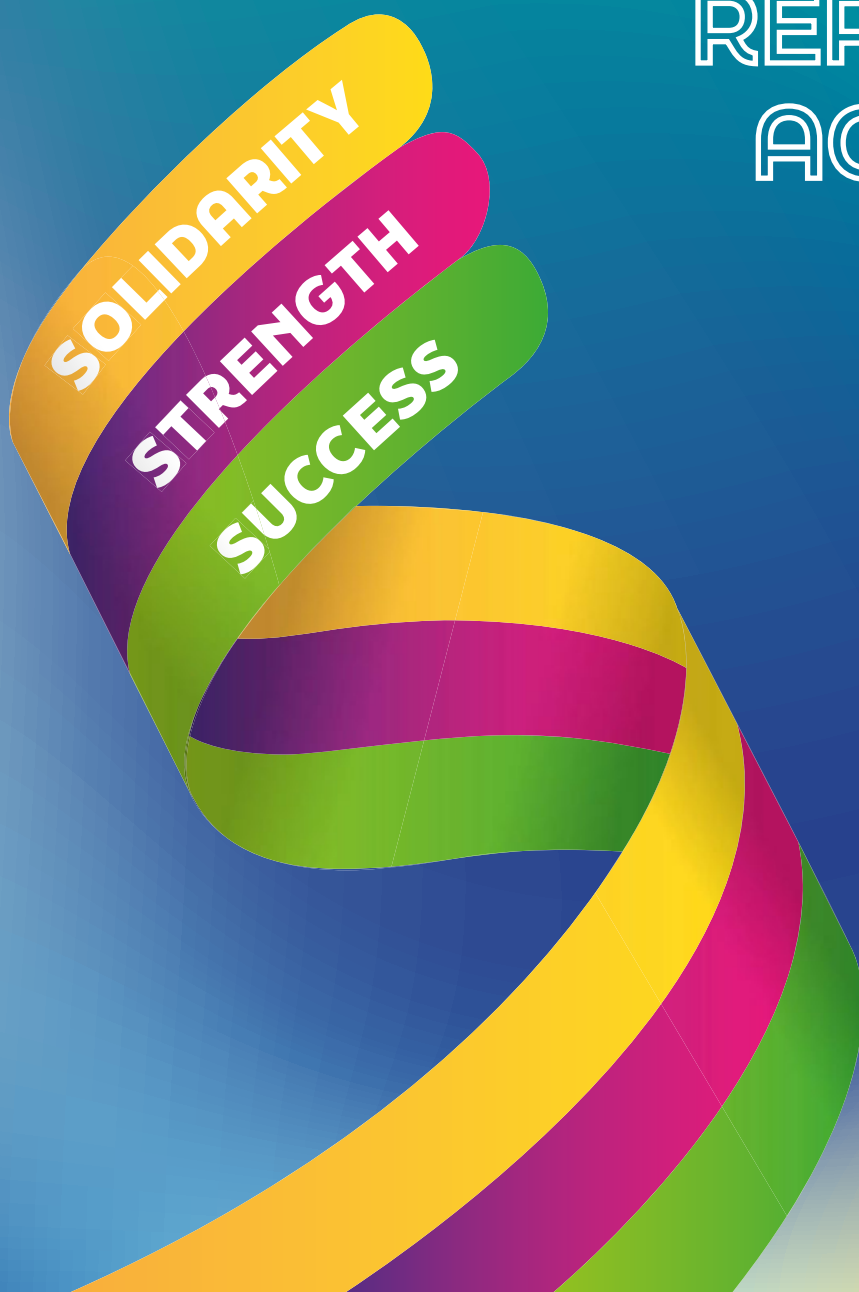
STRONGER TOGETHER

CONGRESS

Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Northern Ireland Committee

Workers Making
Change Happen

REPORT &
AGENDA



BDC24

Membership of the Northern Ireland Committee 2022-24

Chairperson	P Mackel	UCU
Vice-Chairperson	J White	UTU
Members	S Fitzgerald H Crickard C Gates E Massey G Mathews D Walker J Clayton P McKeown N McNally M McTaggart* J McCamphill R Neal T Trainor A Moffatt J Quinn D Crilly	UNITE Belfast Trades Council NIPSA CWU PCS GMB UNISON UNISON SIPTU INTO NASUWT USDAW UNITE Prospect FBU NIPSA
Ex-Officio	O Reidy G Murphy	General Secretary ICTU Asst. General Secretary
Observers	M Galloway R Sharkey	Retired Workers Committee Youth Committee

Attendance At Meetings

At the time of preparing this report 18 meetings were held during the 2022-24 period. The following is the attendance record of the NIC-ICTU members:

S Fitzgerald	9	D Crilly	12	H Crickard	12	M Galloway	16
N McNally	14	P Mackel	13	A Moffatt	8	J Quinn	9
J McCamphill	13	G Mathews	12	R Neal	0	J Clayton	16
T Trainor	16	J White	14	P McKeown	14	M McTaggart	11
D Walker	12	E Massey	9	C Gates	17	R Sharkey	12

*M McTaggart became INTO observer after G Murphy became AGS

Contents

Contents

Membership	4
Timetable	6

A Introduction

A1 Introduction	10
A2 Obituaries	12

B Conference Resolutions

B1 Introduction	16
B2 Referendum	21

C Trade Union Organisation

C1 Officers of the Northern Ireland Committee 2022-24	24
C2 Staff	24
C3 Women's Committee	24
C4 Retired Workers' Committee	25
C5 Youth Committee	27
C6 Trades Councils	29
C7 Global Solidarity	31
C8 Trade Union Friends of Palestine ...	34
C9 Health & Safety	36
C10 Arts and Culture Committee	38
C11 May Day	42

D Trade Union Education

D1 The Trade Union Education Programme	48
D2 Union Learning Fund	51

E Political & Economic Report

E1 TWIN TRACK – From campaigning & strikes to restoration and the NI Employment Bill	56
E2 Democracy at Work – Participation, lobbying, legislation	64
E3 New Employment Bill	69
E4 Challenging Racism and the Far Right	70
E5 Health Committee	72
E6 Education Trade Union Group	78
E7 Council of the Isles/ North-South Committee	80
E8 Private Sector Committee	81

F Equality & Human Rights

F1 Introduction	84
F2 Women's Committee	87
F3 Disability Committee	96
F4 LGBT	96
F5 Migrant Workers	97

G Industrial Relations

G1 LRA Engagement Forum	102
G2 Better in a Trade Union	102
G3 Employment Bill	104
G4 Industrial Action	118

H Appendices

Standing Orders	126
Motions by Sector	130
Code of Conduct	159

Footnote: Most photos taken by Kevin Cooper/Photoline.



TIMETABLE BDC 2024

Wed 13 November

Session 1: 10.30am – 1pm

Fraternal Greetings,
Derry Trade Union Council

Conference Opening
Deputy Mayor of Derry & Strabane Council

Conference Arrangements
Committee Report no 1. Report no 2
(to be circulated if appropriate).

Appointment of tellers and scrutineers

Chair of the Northern Ireland Committee,
ICTU Address to conference

General Secretary, ICTU,
Address to conference

Sections A and B of the report Motions 1-7

Guest Speaker: David Carroll ICTU

NIC-ICTU

1. Tackling violent extremism

UNISON

2. Challenging racism and all forms of
hatred and promoting rights and equality
for all

NIPSA

3. A Trade Union Response to Racism and
the Far Right

NASUWT

4. Tackling the use of social media to
promote extremist ideologies.

NUJ

5. Abuse of journalists

UTU

6. Freedom from Intimidation and
Harassment

CSP

7. Support for internationally educated
health and social care staff

Guest speaker: Israel Eguagie,
Co-ordinator, Belfast City of Sanctuary

Guest Speaker
First Minister Michelle O'Neill
(or DFM Emma Little-Pengelly)

Lunch 1-2.15

Fringe Meetings

1. Ending Violence against Women and
Girls: role of trade unions.
The Whittaker Room

2. Kurdistan
Green Room

Session 2: 2.15pm – 5.00pm

Motions 8-22

Human Rights & Equality

B&DTC & GMB

8. Violence Against Women & Girls

PCS

9/ Equality legislation and pay gaps

RWC (NIC-ICTU motion)

10. Age Discrimination



GMB & RCM

11. Neurodiversity Inclusion in the Workplace

UNISON

12. Dealing with the legacy of the past

Assistant General Secretary's Address

Workers Rights

NIC-ICTU

13. Good Jobs EMPLOYMENT BILL

FSU

14. Employment legislation

USDAW

15. Abuse is not part of the job

Equity

16. Ban upfront fees charged to performers by casting directories

Equity

17. Pay Promptly!

RCM

18. Flexible affordable childcare

RMT

19. Strengthen Seafarer Employment Rights

FSU

20. Gender Pay Gap

Voting on relevant sections of the report

Fraternal Greetings,
General Secretary STUC

Close of Conference – 5pm

5.15–7pm **Fringe Meeting:**

Trade Union Friends of Palestine – Main Hall

Thursday 14 November

Session 3: 9.30am – 1pm

Motions 23–33

Guest Speaker: Paul Mac Flynn, NERI
to introduce the economic section

Economy & public services

UNISON

21. Fair Funding and addressing priorities in a Programme for Government

DTUC

22. Regional Disparities

FSU

23. Bank branches and bank hubs

Equity

25. Safe Home Supporting the Night-Time Economy

FBU

26. Renew our fire and rescue service.

Fraternal Greetings,
General Secretary TUC

FCTU

27. Universal Postal Service

NIPSA

28. Social Housing

B&DTC

29. Housing

UNITE

30. Housing For All



PCS

31. Opposing Privatisation and Campaigning for In-Housing in the Public Sector

CWU & UNITE

32. Winter fuel payments

UNITE & GMB

33. Industrial policy for jobs and a future

President of ICTU: Address to conference

Lunch 1-2.15**Session 4: 2.15pm – 5.30pm****Health****PDA**

34. Lack of Inclusion is Active Exclusion

CSP

35. Health Inequalities

SIPTU

36. NHS Waiting Lists

SIPTU

37. Adequate Sick Pay Provision

Fraternal Greetings,
Wales TUC

Education**GMB & UCU**

38. Expansion of the Ulster University
Magee Campus In Derry

UTU

39. Disability

INTO

40. Special Educational Needs

INTO

41. Early Years

NASUWT

42. Professional Regulation of Teachers

DTUC

43. Education

Trade Union Organisation**NIPSA**

44. Inter Union Relations

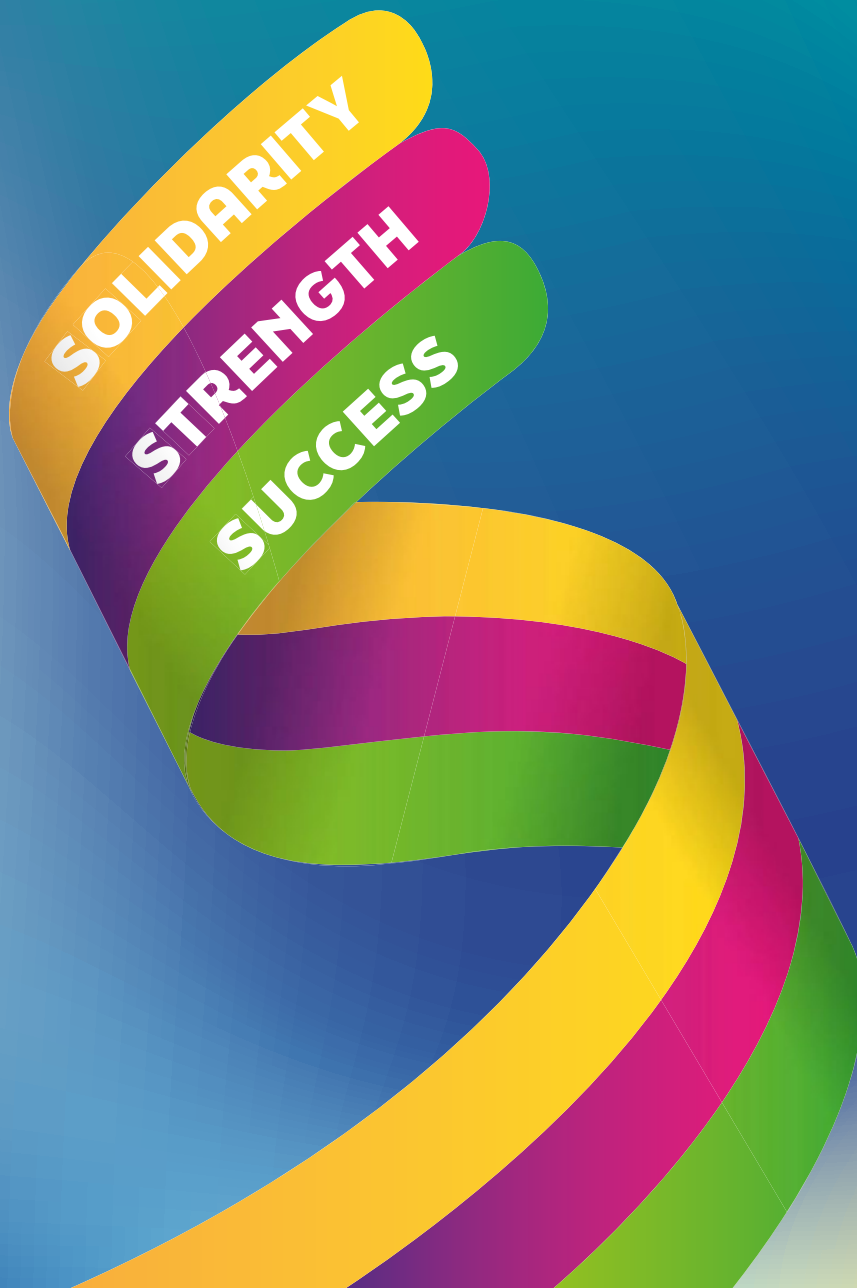
USDAW

45. Organising for the Future

Any remaining motions

Section A

INTRODUCTION



BDC24



A1 Introduction

Gerry Murphy

Assistant General Secretary ICTU

This report outlines the work of the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU from our last conference in November 2022 right through to October 2022. The period in question has been marked by the largest wave of industrial action seen in this part of the world in over a century.

In retrospect, we were in a perfect storm, and unlike the turmoil of recent decades, such as the 2008 financial crash and Brexit, we were not prepared to be disregarded, blamed and further imposed upon. The origins of the 2022 cost of living crisis may have come from events in eastern Europe, but the underlying weakness of the UK economy was exposed by its inability to cope with the pandemic after a decade of austerity and the continuing outworkings of Brexit. Workers were not the problem.

In a united fashion, the trade union movement decided to 'secure for the workers by hand or by brain' a better and fairer way. Ideas for more equitable and efficient distribution of resources and power were formulated, and outlined in the policy papers 'No Going Back' and its NI-specific companion from summer 2023, 'Smart Money: Better options for Northern Ireland's public finances.'

The work 'by hand' came from the callous refusal by the then Tory Secretary of State to countenance a fair wage increase for the public sector workers. And so, this period saw a wave of industrial action engulf every element of the public service as workers said enough was enough.

The final Tory Secretary of State, Chris Heaton-Harris, saw this as an opportunity to weaponise the hardship faced by working people. A battering ram to be used on politicians he wanted to abandon their principles and return to Stormont with their tails between their legs and the complaints



of their constituents ringing in their ears. This was evidence of the same tactical nous possessed by the Prime Minister who appointed him, Liz Truss.

His approach was a resounding failure. It is also worth noting that the private sector saw a wave of industrial action which was, mostly, settled very quickly by sensible employers who offered their workers pay rises at or above inflation. This simply made public servants even more determined to win a fair deal, and a series of strikes and action short of strike culminated in the 'Generalised Day of Action' on 18 January 2024.

In parallel, a political process and fiscal consensus had been established with every NI party arguing for the same fiscal options outlined months earlier in our 'Smart Money' paper.

We welcomed the restoration of the institutions of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, and our support then and now was demonstrated at a major conference in December 2023 attended by all political parties and the shadow Secretary of State. We are still campaigning on the streets and in the workplaces, but we are regularly engaging with the local political class in a manner that is relatively new.

We think this approach is offering potential rewards, such as challenging our exclusion from public bodies over decades, and especially since the 1998 agreement we championed. We are determined that workers will be represented at the tables of power and influence.

The pay disputes which brought 170,000 workers out on strike at the start of this year have been settled. For now. But it needs to be remembered that each individual act of industrial action is a profoundly democratic activity. Each postal ballot, each hour spent on a picket line, or writing a tweet or a letter to a newspaper, or buttonholing their MLA, is a demonstration of public engagement and also of solidarity with all of the co-workers being spoken for.

This solidarity, and all of those small individual acts of citizenship, will ensure that the 'Good Jobs' Employment Bill makes it to the final stage of the legislative process, with its ideals and best contents intact. This is the work of now, and it will be a remarkable legacy. That is the prize. That is a job for all of us at this conference. We must keep the momentum going.

Lastly, I wish to thank all affiliate unions, trades councils, all NIC members and Chair Paddy Mackel and Vice Chair Jacquie White and all of the NIC-ICTU staff for their work and commitment over what has been an incredibly challenging time. It is important that we keep focused and achieve a prize which eluded generations of trade unionists – real, radical and tangible gains for working people across our society. This generation's hard work will produce Good Work for theirs and future generations.



A2 Obituaries

Macdara Doyle

In August 2024 our movement was shocked and saddened by the untimely death of ICTU campaigns officer Macdara Doyle. Macdara (59) died at his home following a recent cancer diagnosis. A moving memorial service in Dublin heard tributes from friends and sympathy offered to Macdara's wife Brónach, daughter Aoife, son Ruairdhí, mother Marie and his sisters Ashling and Niamh.

A member of the NUJ's Dublin P&PR branch he marked the 20th anniversary of his appointment as an ICTU staff member earlier this month. Macdara was a long serving communications officer and more recently worked on major campaigns including the housing coalition, Raise the Roof, and the Just Transition/Climate Change strategy.

Prior to joining Congress he was communications officer with Concern and travelled extensively highlighting global crisis in poverty and hunger. He had a lifelong interest in development issues. He began his journalism career in An Phoblacht, Big Issue and In Dublin. He also worked on the Sunday Tribune and on Magill magazine, where he was noted for his incisive media column and investigative journalism.

In a tribute Séamus Dooley, NUJ Irish Secretary said:

"Macdara was as talented and committed as he was unassuming. He made a significant contribution to journalism and the trade union movement. He was gifted, loyal and retained his strong commitment to social justice."

An additional talent was a direct and pithy style which suited perfectly the letters pages of the Irish Times, such as this, from 2008:

"Madam, - Not even the combined talents of Lewis Carroll and Jonathan Swift would have been capable of generating the high farce which The Irish Times delivered on Thursday: a billionaire businessman who refuses to contribute a cent towards running the country is given space in your pages to lecture the rest of us on how it should be done."

Mr Denis O'Brien is worth more than €2 billion and chooses to absent himself from this country for the bulk of the year in order to avoid paying tax here."

Consequently, it is the view of Congress that he should not be afforded a public platform from which to lecture and hector those of us who do contribute."

It is telling that in what amounted to little more than a "slash and burn" tract, Mr O'Brien reveals how his own business profits from the services established and paid for by Irish taxpayers, when he writes: "My own businesses overseas have benefited from the expertise of officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs". Unfortunately, Mr O'Brien failed to furnish an address where we might forward the bill for the services of which he availed, at our expense. Or perhaps he really does believe that taxes are for "little people". - Yours, etc,



Pamela Dooley

Pamela Dooley - an inspirational and utterly determined trade union leader. As Head of Organising, Pamela helped UNISON to grow to the largest union in NI.

She was the first to organise workers in the community and voluntary sector 30 years ago. At her initiative, Filipino workers were organised when they arrived into our hospitals and care homes. She saved many from exploitation. She worked with Traveller families to challenge discrimination. She brought the union's Education Programme to women in prisons. She rescued trafficked women and campaigned against domestic violence. Pamela dedicated years to developing Unison's branches, encouraging women members, building its LGBT+ membership and growing our Black and Migrant Workers organisation.

In ICTU, as Chair of the Northern Women's Committee, Chair of the NI Committee and a member of the Executive Council, she bore her responsibilities with dignity and determination. She led thousands in the protest march against the G8 and thousands more in the peace rally after the murder of Constable Ronan Kerr. She

was a key part of the ICTU delegation which brought our main political parties to Colombia to support that Peace Process. On behalf of the movement, Pamela gave evidence to Westminster and NI Assembly Committees challenging human trafficking, domestic violence and the need for the UK Government to extend UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security to NI.

After retiring from her position as Head of Organising, Pamela became Chair of the Migrant Centre NI and fought for funding that has put it in a position of strength today. She continued to lead UNISON's partnerships in the health service and to the very end dedicated herself to training our women members and new stewards. We recall only a fraction of her achievements. Throughout all these struggles and achievements Pamela refused to let the breast cancer which had struck her decades before, define her life.

She shared her experiences with other women and supported them. She did it her way to the end. And her way was one of outstanding integrity, compassion and unswerving dedication to those in need of support and those she loved.



Marjorie Trimble

UNISON senior activist, Marjorie Trimble started her union life as a hospital domestic in Whiteabbey Hospital in 1991 with its predecessor union NUPE. Marjorie was one of the founding members of UNISON in 1993. Held in the highest esteem by members she was elected to many key positions including Joint Branch Secretary of UNISON's United Hospitals branch in the old Northern Health Board area and later, Joint Branch Secretary Northern Health Branch covering Antrim, Whiteabbey and Holywell Hospitals and social services in both the Trust and private sector.

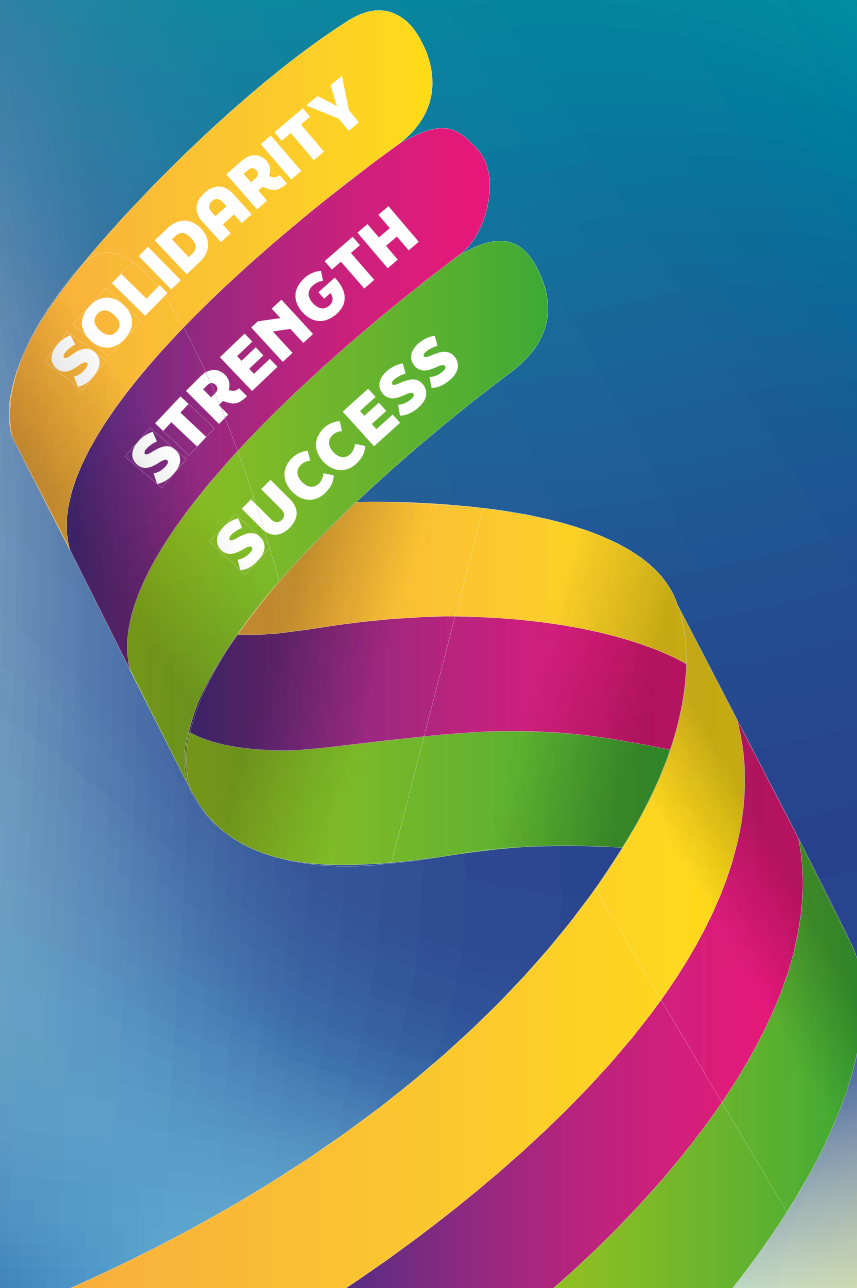
As a member of a formidable union trio with the late Judy Linton and the late Billy Weir, they helped build what is today's largest branch - Northern Health. She fought determinedly against the privatisation of hospital domestics. She stayed with the members when they were transferred by stealth to the private contractor, Mediclean, and she helped win them compensation and their early return in-house.

Marjorie Trimble also made a significant contribution to the Peace Process. From the early 90's she was a champion for her Monkstown community. She was one of the first ICTU representatives on the EU Peace Programme, working with others to distribute peace monies. She would eventually become the Vice Chair of Newtownabbey District Peace Partnership.

As a champion for members with disabilities and a senior member of the Women's Committee and Regional Committee, Marjorie made a major contribution to UNISON. As her health deteriorated she engaged in union business in her wheel chair with canisters of oxygen to help her breathe. When she could no longer do this physically, she took to online meetings - almost to the end.

Section B

CONFERENCE RESOLUTIONS



BDC24

Conference Resolutions

B1 Introduction

The NI BDC scheduled for March 2022 was instead held in November in Enniskillen and was chaired by Alison Millar (NIPSA) whose tenure was marked by the covid pandemic and tightening economic conditions. The conference was also the final such event with Owen Reidy as AGS, before his appointment as ICTU General Secretary.

As in previous years, the NIC-ICTU has pursued a wide range of actions in relation to the Resolutions. The following provides a broad outline of the actions taken. More detail is contained in the body of the Report.

1. Workers Demand Better

NIC-ICTU

This has been the core work of the NIC-ICTU in the last 2 years, including successful lobbying for the introduction of an Employment Bill based on progressive policies.



Alison Millar

2. Government must deliver for workers in the cost of living crisis

UNISON

The NIC-ICTU and trade union movement was fully engaged in bringing pressure on the political parties to reform the Executive. Lobbying for a fair deal for workers has been core to the work agenda of the NIC-ICTU in this mandate.

3. Cost of Living

Composite Motion: UNITE and CWU NI Region

NIC-ICTU and its affiliates have taken a strategic approach to the cost of living crisis by seeking pay increases to match or outstrip inflation, and reinforcing that with industrial action when necessary, following negotiations with employers and government, up to and including the Minister for Finance upon the restoration of devolution.

4. Tackling One-Sided Flexibility

USDAW

The issues raised in this motion are being addressed through the employment bill. The NIC-ICTU Secretariat have worked intensively to ensure a robust and comprehensive response and policy document has been developed to influence the bill for workers.

5. Basic Income for the Arts

EQUITY

NIC-ICTU has fully supported Equity in their campaign to achieve decent work and standard of living across the arts and entertainment sectors. A renewed NIC-ICTU Arts and Culture Committee has been established and is meeting regularly.



B

Conference Resolutions

6. Unity of Purpose

NIPSA

This has formed the basis of the work that the NIC-ICTU has carried out in this mandate with unions co-operating to organise the biggest day of industrial action in many years in January 2024.

7. Workplace Democracy & Reform of Statutory Recognition Rights in NI

SIPTU

As above, the issues raised in this motion are being addressed via the employment bill.

8. Strategic community and voluntary sector forum

Derry Council of Trades Unions

This motion was remitted.



Anton McCabe
Omagh TC

9. Shaping Safe Workplaces

EQUITY

The NIC-ICTU fully supports Equity in their campaign for safe work for their members. Freedom from fear and harassment is a core element of our model of Good Work and the incoming NIC-ICTU will work with sub-committees to address these issues across a range of sectors.

10. Responding to our planetary emergency

Belfast Council of Trades Unions

The Climate working group has been established and has been consulted by DAERA officials on trade union participation on the forthcoming NI Just Transition Commission. The NI group is chaired by Dooley Harte and is liaising with TU members of Just Transition commissions in Wales, Scotland and RoI. NIC-ICTU also fundraised and organised successive COP marches attended by affiliates, campaign groups and political parties.



11. Railways – Into the West Rail Campaign

Fermanagh Council of Trade Unions

ICTU is examining though its participation on PeacePlus and is supportive of the Irish Government's announced plans for updating and expanding the rail network across this island. However, this announced plan presently excludes county Fermanagh and this remains a priority issue for ICTU representatives on LEEF.



Jim Quinn Fermanagh TC



Angela Moffatt, Prospect

12. End Profit Gouging from fossil fuels

NIPSA

Congress continues to pursue a just transition for workers and the environment

13. Decarbonising public services

UNISON

As above, and will be on the agenda of the forthcoming NI Just Transition Commission.

14. Show Racism the Red Card

EQUITY

This charity does not organise in NI but the NIC-ICTU is working with BAME and anti-racism groups in NI, notably Belfast City of Sanctuary, Belfast Islamic Centre, Belfast City Council Migrant Forum and others.

15. Challenging the Far Right and their Narratives.

Belfast and District Trade's Council

Core work of the NIC-ICTU. Congress has also developed an anti-far right project and tool kit which is being piloted across a range of sectors and unions.

16. Age Discrimination Legislation

Fermanagh Council of Trade Unions

NIC-ICTU has supported campaigns to call for the introduction of anti discrimination measures on the grounds of age in goods, facilities and services. This formed a key part of our submission to the TEO inquiry on gaps in equality law.

17. Age Discrimination

NIC-ICTU on behalf of the Retired Workers Committee

As above.



Shadow Secretary of State Peter Kyle MP addressing the Conference

18. Discrimination Against Older People in Northern Ireland

PROSPECT

As above.

19. Relationship and Sexuality Education & comprehensive training

UTU

Comprehensive RSE is a core issue for the ETUG and the Women's Committee.

20. Protecting Women and Girls in Schools

NASUWT

Working with NASUWT, the Women's Committee and with allies in civil society to end violence against women and girls in the whole of society. Have held special events to highlight this issue and continue to progress the agenda.

21. Violence Against Women

UNITE

Core work for the NIC-ICTU and the Women's Committee.

Also represented in the co-design group to develop the Ending Violence against Women and Girls strategy.

22. Protect Retail Workers from Abuse, Threats and Violence

USDAW

NIC-ICTU fully supports USDAW in their campaign to achieve decent work and freedom from fear for their members. This has also been addressed by raising the gap which has now developed between NI and GB since the Workers Protection Act was developed.

23. NUJ - online hate speech and abuse

Congress has developed a training programme on positive use of social media.

24. Protect the right to protest

NIPSA

Core work of the NIC, and informed a detail response to a consultation by Belfast City Council on street events, such as music, preaching or protests.

25. Covid recovery must continue to be monitored for equality

CSP

Core work of the NIC-ICTU Secretariat working with affiliates to highlight equality issues through the Covid Inquiry.

26. NIC-ICTU motion on access to abortion services

NIC-ICTU and the Women's Committee continue to campaign for fully funded and accessible abortion services.

Core work for the NIC-ICTU and the Health Committee.

FSU Delegates



27. A renewed cross-departmental strategy to tackle inequalities and ill-health

CSP

Core work for the Health Committee and will also form part of demands for the new PFG.

28. Hot food for healthcare workers

Society of Radiographers

The NIC-ICTU Health Committee unions have raised this in negotiations with Health Trusts.

29. A New Maternity Strategy for Northern Ireland

RCM

RCM and the Health Committee welcomed the Department of Health's report into Northern Ireland's midwifery services. The College sees this review, led by Professor Mary Renfrew, as a move in the right direction to deliver more choice and safer and better maternity care for women, babies and their families.

The NIC-ICTU will continue, through it's work on the Health Committee and Women's Committee, to make robust representation for an appropriately resourced maternity strategy to be brought forward.

30. Fighting for our health and social care services

UNISON

Core work of the NIC-ICTU and Health Committee – also representation with Department for Communities in relation to social inclusion strategies and will be pursued in our responses to the Programme for Government.

31. International Recruitment Charter

Society of Radiographers

The NIC-ICTU Health Committee unions have raised this in negotiations with Health Trusts.

32. Cost of Education

NASUWT

Core work of the NIC-ICTU and the ETUG.

33. Financial crisis in schools

INTO

Core work of the NIC-ICTU and the ETUG.

34. Future of Financial Services

FSU

Raised by the Retired Workers Committee in various fora, also will be raised as a key issue in engagements with the Department for the Economy's strategy for improved regional balance.



Gerealdine Alexander and Denise Crilly, NIPSA

B2 Referendum

The 2022 BDC heard an important speech from the ICTU General Secretary Owen Reidy, which was widely reported. Comments on constitutional matters received some attention and for clarity, here is a full transcription of this section of Owen's speech.

I want to touch on an issue that I think we can no longer ignore, and that is the issue of the constitutional future of the island of Ireland.

I think it's an issue that can't be avoided. I think it's an issue that if we're serious about representing all of our members, and I stress all of our members, we must engage in it, irrespective of people's views on the matter. I think everyone would agree that things that have taken place in the last decade, particularly around the issue of Brexit and other matters, has made the possibility or the prospect of a referendum over the next decade more likely.

The outcome of that referendum as a matter for the people primarily in Northern Ireland, but also in the Republic of Ireland, because it would be a ballot on both sides of the border. So the people will decide, but I do think it is probably more likely than not, that that type of a referendum may take place in the next 10 years.

And let's remember the Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement, which we mark quarter of a century next May, and which we supported from the outset. And (remember) many of the people in this room and many of the people who went before us fought very hard to make it a reality. That agreement is very clear. It creates the space and the context for people who want constitutional change, to lobby for it, to articulate it and to advocate it, as long as they do it by peaceful means.



Owen Reidy addresses conference

It also provides the equivalent opportunity for people who want the status quo and to keep that link, to advocate for it, to campaign for it, as a lobby for it, by peaceful means – two very legitimate, balanced equal aspirations.

And the reason why I think we need to be involved in this debate is that the trade union movement in Northern Ireland – but actually quite frankly, across the island – there is no other organisation like us. We are unique. There's no political party like us. There's no church group like us. There's no civil society organisation like us, that has the reach and the breadth into every community, in Northern Ireland, and indeed, in Ireland because we are truly cross community.

We have that rich diversity that is our strength, that plurality of views. So I think our unique voice needs to be heard in this debate. In this room, it's a microcosm of our society. There are people in this room who would define themselves as Nationalist, Unionist, Loyalist, Republican, a little bit of both or some of the above, and a number of people who would consider themselves none of the above.

There's no other organisation, there's no other movement, there's no other grouping that can bring that diversity of people together. So I think we should engage in this debate with confidence, with strength and crucially, with a unity of purpose.

This debate is too important to be left to politicians. And it is too important to be left to people who have firm and fixed views, irrespective of what their view is, because there are many people who haven't got a settled view but - and it's a huge but - as we engage in this debate, because engage we must, let us do so in the time honoured trade union tradition of respect, of tolerance, and acceptance of diverse views on this issue.

There is no one right view, there are many right views. Let's represent the diverse identities and cultural backgrounds that we all come from. Because we are the only people who represent that rich, diverse background - no one else does.

But as we do this, let's remember the primacy of the unity of our movement is the key issue. And it is the essential issue, and we must do nothing to destabilise that. I think we should remember those who went before us who kept this movement together in the worst of times, who spilled their sweat, and extended their labour to make sure that our movement remained united during the troubles in the 60s 70s and 80s. They did it in a much more challenging time. And we are all the better for it.

So, in honour of their legacy, and their memory, but I think much more importantly, in honour of the future of our children and their children's children. They need a strong trade union movement. They need a united trade union movement on this island.

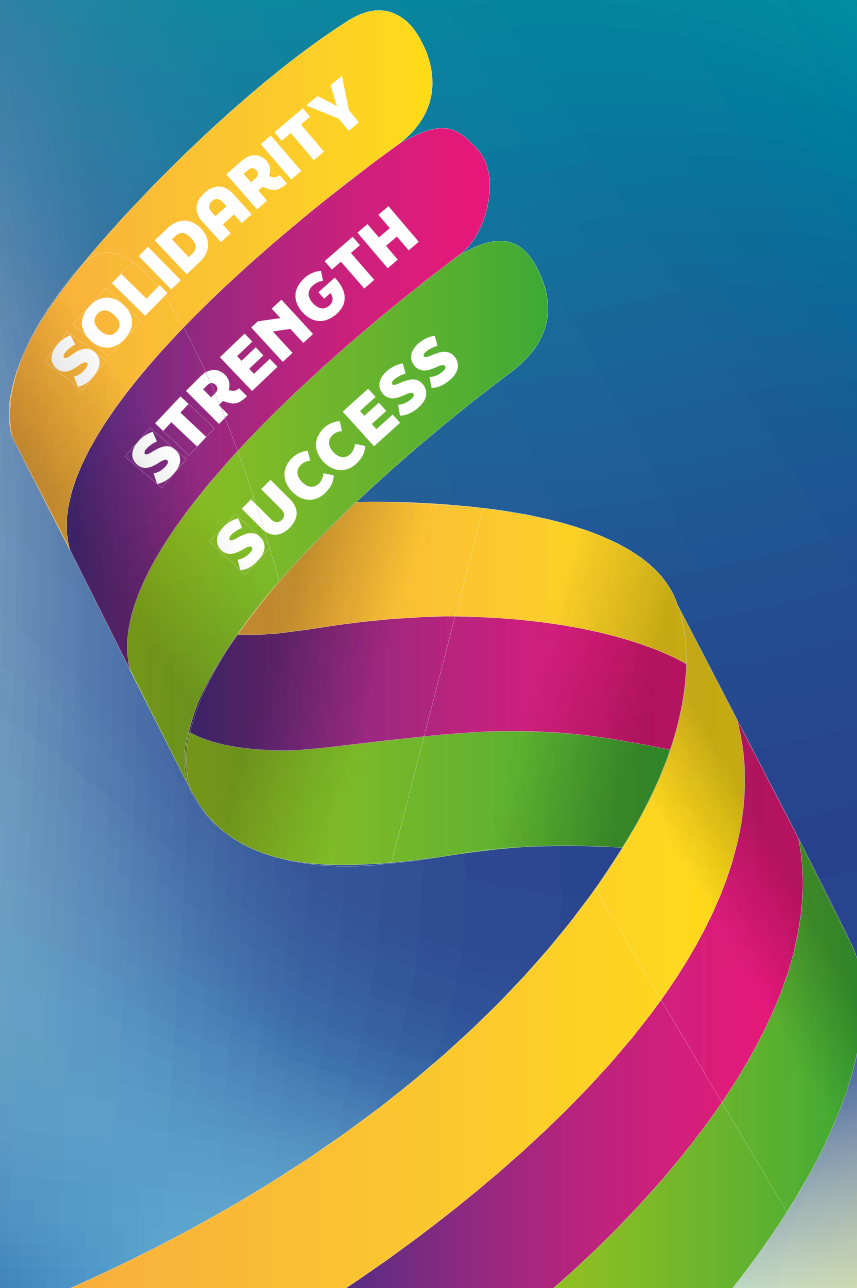
We do not want to become a movement that primarily gets its support from people who want constitutional change. We do not want to become a trade union movement that primarily gets support from people who want the constitutional status quo. We are we must remain a movement that gets its support from all workers, who want and desire greater justice in society and more fairness at work. Whether it's in one jurisdiction or two, it's a matter for the people.

So the unity of our movement must remain the bedrock. And it must be the ambition. And I think it must be the obligation of this generation of trade union leaders - and each and every one of you in this room are trade union leaders - there is an onus and an obligation on us to pass our movement on to our children and their children that is united, that speaks with one voice. And that maintains the diversity and the rich difference of opinion on this issue that we've had for a long time into the future.

If we don't do that, workers who come after us will suffer and they will have it worse off. We have been handed that opportunity to make our movement stronger and better. But let's keep it united.

Section C

TRADE UNION ORGANISATION



BDC24

Section C Trade Union Organisation

C1 Officers of the Northern Ireland Committee 2022-24

At its meeting held in December 2022, the Committee elected the following Officers:

Chairperson:

Paddy Mackel (UCU)



Vice-Chairperson:

Jacquie White (UTU)



C2 Staff

The following refers to the staff in the Northern Ireland Office during 2022-24:

Assistant General Secretary

Gerry Murphy

Education, Training & Lifelong Learning

Kevin Doherty

Finance & Programme Manager

Gillian Allen

Equality & Social Affairs

Clare Moore

Policy & Communications

John O'Farrell

Project Officer

Julie Gorman

Administrative Officer

Tony Gallagher

C3 Women's Committee

The work of the Women's Committee is contained in Section F of this report, along with the other Equality Committees.

C4 Retired Workers' Committee



RWC chair Margaret Galloway

The Retired Workers' Committee (RWC) continues to forge ahead with an ambitious agenda under the chair of Margaret Galloway (PCS), and its vice-Chair Hugh Rafferty (Unite).

The Retired Workers' Committee (RWC) has regular in-person meetings after the initial lockdown hiatus. Two Age Seminars were held in Wexford in joint session with the Rol RWC in March 2023 and March 2024.

A great supporter of the RWC is Eddie Lynch, the Commissioner for Older People NI, who briefed the committee regularly, and spoke online at a session on the rights of older people during the pandemic at the 2021 Age Seminar. Eddie took part in the Age Seminar held in Belfast in September 2022, the first such 'in-person' event. It is hoped that Eddie's replacement when his term ends will be as useful an ally.

Another group which has a strong relationship is the UK-based National Pensioners' Convention, and of course

many members of the RWC are also members of the (NI) Region of the NPC. It's chair Jan Shortt participated in the 2023 Age Seminar, alongside senior trade union leaders including ICTU's President and General Secretary. In 2024, the Seminar explored how the two RWCs can work more effectively together, as was the case before covid. The ICTU President and Youth Committee chair also contributed. There were other speakers from the Irish Senior Citizens Parliament, Family Carers Ireland, and Adrian Kane, Labour historian and SIPTU activist.

Members of the RWC are active in the retired sections of their own affiliates, and also with the All-Party Group on Ageing and Older People, which has continued to meet with stakeholders even with the NI Assembly in abeyance. Its Chair is Claire Sugden MLA. Age NI hosted in 2021 a Pensioners' Parliament in the NI Assembly chamber with age groups (including trade unions) discussing pressing issues such as fuel poverty and services for older people. This has been revived under the return of devolution, and RWC members are active in its preparation and delivery.



ICTU President Justin McCampbell addresses 2024 Age Seminar



General Secretary, Owen Reidy addressing the 2023 seminar

RWC members were also active in a campaign to preserve the great universal service of the concession pass for over 60's, which was threatened in the wave of suggested cuts which came from ever devolved department under the period of suspension. ICTU affiliates informed its response, which was supported by street demonstrations outside the Department of Infrastructure (DfI).

In summary, NIC-ICTU opposed the DfI's options proposed to 'reduce the cost of the scheme'.

- We believe these options are a false economy as the 'savings' will be small in the context of NI Executive spending.

Imposing such a cut could have a greater impact on public expenditure in the medium and long term due to the corrosive social and health impacts of increasing social isolation for already marginalised people.

- ICTU as a general point of principle supports universal public services funded through progressive taxation. Part of the rationale for this is that services which are universally available to all, not means-tested, tend to be better quality services than a two-tier system. It is also a useful rule of thumb that universal services are far cheaper to administer than those qualified by means-testing or some of the bureaucratic proposals suggested such as application and renewal fees or residency tests. The present administration costs of the scheme amount to 1.2% of the overall budget.
- The reasons for the increased costs of the scheme over two decades are simple: inflation and increased life expectancy. The former is for reasons beyond the budgeting of the Department for Infrastructure, and the latter is widely viewed as a positive effect of increased public health, and as mentioned this social positive is down to



Travel pass demonstration outside the Department of Infrastructure

public investment in our NHS and official encouragement for people to have healthier lifestyles, such as getting out of their homes and participating in society, family life, leisure and consumption.

ICTU policy since 2019 has been to extend free public transport to everyone (now a trend across many cities in Europe). The motion from the PCS trade union and voted by conference overwhelmingly in favour stated:

"Fully funded, free public transport, provided by the public sector would remove the significant barriers to social and economic inclusion of the Island's citizens from the elderly to the young, those in rural areas to cities. It will provide secure employment. It will connect communities. It will help create a greener environment and tackle climate change."

All of those positives are still true. In addition, the affordability of free public transport for all was analysed and outlined by the Nevin Economic Research Institute:

"The government should consider expanded public transport that is free at the point of use as a move to reduce car use and alleviate transport costs."

Margaret Galloway attended and addressed the ICTU BDC in Kilkenny in 2023 as a guest speaker, and a motion from the ICTU Executive on behalf of retired members was passed. The motion called for action in both jurisdictions on the 'Rising Cost of living and Living Standards on a Fixed Income'. The conference endorsed the motion's which calls authorities in both jurisdictions to make permanent State support for household energy bills and make it easier and more affordable for older homeowners to undertake home energy upgrades, as well as to copper fasten gains in State Pensions and secondary benefits made in recent years, such as the UK's triple-lock.

The last NI BDC passed motions which called for stronger legislation to be introduced "to secure the rights of older persons in Northern Ireland by being the last jurisdiction on these islands to pass a long-promised law outlawing age discrimination in the delivery of goods facilities and services" and this has been front and centre of interactions with government in NI since the return of devolution.

C5 Youth Committee

In February 2022, the ICTU Youth Committee was reconstituted as an all-island committee, serviced by the Northern Ireland office of Congress.

The ICTU Youth Committee continues to play a pivotal role in representing young members across the trade union movement, championing their voices, and driving initiatives that reflect their concerns and aspirations. Chaired by Ronan Sharkey (NASUWT) who was appointed to the ETUC Youth Committee for 2023/24, the committee has seen tremendous growth and increased influence over the past year.

Ronan Sharkey has also represented Ireland's young trade union members at international levels, attending ETUC Conferences in Bilbao, Spain and Brussels, where he ensured that the voice of Ireland's young workers was heard on a European stage.

Maeve Richardson (SIPTU), serving as Vice Chair, led key projects, most notably the design and implementation of the Your Rights at Work Card, a crucial resource that equips young workers with essential knowledge of their rights.

The committee has been active in ensuring youth representation at various levels of the trade union movement. Michael Kerrigan (FORSA) is the Youth Committee Observer on the Congress Executive Council and Ronan on the NIC.

A key focus for the committee has been increasing youth engagement in Trades Councils, reinforcing the voice of young members in decision-making spaces. The committee also actively participated in the Better in a Trade Union campaign, advocating the benefits of union membership to younger workers.

In addition, the ICTU Youth Committee took part in the Anti-Racism in the Workplace Project, emphasising its commitment to equality and fairness in the workplace.

As a result of these efforts, the profile of the ICTU Youth Committee has risen significantly, with membership growing to an impressive 23 young workers, and continuing to expand. The committee remains dedicated to empowering the next



Ronan Sharkey speaks at the Good Friday Agreement event

generation of trade union leaders, ensuring that the interests of young workers are well-represented and championed.





Belfast Trades Council hosted a series of events to celebrate May Day 2024. 'Our Work, Our Lives, Our Place' was a joint project with The Community Arts Partnership and the ICTU

C6 Trades Councils

Trades Union Councils (TCs) bring together union reps, officials and activists living or working in their respective geographical areas. TCs work and campaign around issues affecting working people in their local workplaces and communities. They have been the backbone of, and at times the instigators of, many trade union campaigns that have sought to unite affiliates and communities behind common issues.

TCs assist the Northern Ireland Committee by campaigning on a range of issues. These issues have covered:

- Providing solidarity to workers engaged in industrial action.
- Engaging with local media.
- Protecting health services.
- Campaigning against social and economic deprivation in local communities.

- Supporting BME migrant workers and opposing racism.
- Supporting trade union recruitment campaigns.
- Defending the NIHE and opposing stock transfers.
- International solidarity, particularly with Trade Union Friends of Palestine.

Currently there are active trades' councils in Ballymena and Antrim, Belfast, Craigavon, Derry, Fermanagh, Mid Ulster, North Down and Ards, and Omagh. In addition to this, Causeway TC has recently been re-established.

All TC's are affiliated to ICTU, and they come together quarterly at meetings of the Trades Councils Consultative Committee (TCCC) to share information and initiatives, and to develop and coordinate joint campaigns.

Some of the activities local TCs have been involved in include:

- Ballymena and Antrim Trades Council (B&ATC) engage with the Inter-Ethnic Forum (Mid & East Antrim) to improve working conditions of migrant workers in the area. They have lobbied Mid & East Antrim Borough Council on employment opportunities and the impact of high rates levels. The B&ATUC organised a strike rally in Ballymena on the generalised day of strike action.
- Belfast and District Trade Council (B&DTC) and Community Arts Partnership, supported by Belfast City Council, ran a successful May Day community festival after the march and rally, to involve families, BME and other communities in May Day. They have also been involved in a range of anti-war events including a protest at President Biden's visit, Solidarity with Sudan, and rallies and public meetings in solidarity with Palestinians in the face of Israeli military outrages. B&DTC

were involved in the anti-far right protests in Belfast and held a public meeting on how to combat the Far-Right. They organised a number of other public meetings across Belfast on union campaigns and were heavily involved in supporting unions engaging in industrial action. B&DTUC responded to a number of government public consultations including, the 'Financial Context for Revenue Raising.' B&DTC continue to support PRIDE and are represented on a range of organisations including, Belfast City of Sanctuary, TUFPP, Reclaim the Agenda, Alliance for Choice, and the International Brigades Commemoration Committee.

- Craigavon & District Trades Council (C&DTC) worked with Palestinian solidarity groups to run a number of events in their area. C&DTC supported public sector unions engaged in industrial action and also private sector disputes including Vista Therm, Cubis Systems, and Glen Dimplex. They are also involved in Save Craigavon Lakes and Save the Lough campaigns. C&DTC worked with Lurgan Heritage Project to produce a video to mark the death of Spanish Civil war and WWII veteran Jim Haughey
- Derry Trades Council (DTC) run the Worker's Rights and Social Justice Week (WRSJW) of events with Derry City and Strabane District Council, alongside the May Day march and rally each year in Derry. Public meetings were held throughout WRSJW, in 2024, on issues including Palestine solidarity, the crisis in maternity and contraceptive services in the city and beyond, and Derry needs a Real Living Wage. They also organised a number of historical and cultural events as part of the week. DTC are involved in a number of campaigns and organised a number of strike rallies in Derry, including one for the generalised day of action. They have also held protests against racism and against the slaughter in Palestine.

- Fermanagh Council of Trades Unions (FCTU) have been heavily involved in supporting unions engaging in industrial action and organised a rally in Enniskillen for the generalised day of action. They also supported CWU in their campaign to save the BT/EE call centre. FCTU also support the campaign for the restoration of services in the Southwest Area Hospital, the 'Into the West' campaign, and highlight concerns affecting workers and services within their area. FCTU also continue to run events to mark Workers Memorial Day.
- Mid Ulster Trades Council (MUTC) organised strike rallies, including one for the generalised day of action. MUTC ran protests and a public meeting on the situation in Palestine.
- North Down and Ards Trades Council (ND&ATC) have been working with a Bangor based charity that fights food poverty across the borough. They have also been involved in issues around the provision of leisure services in the area. ND&ATC engaged with ethnic minority support groups and local media in response to Far-Right protests outside a hotel where asylum seekers are being housed.
- Omagh Trades Council (OTC) organised an annual event to mark Workers Memorial Day. OTC held a well-attended protest in response to the shooting of a PSNI officer in Omagh. OTC also supported unions involved in industrial action and organised a rally on the generalised day of strike action.

To maintain and develop the work of trade's councils, the TCCC appeals to unions to ensure that they affiliate to and encourage their members and activists to engage with the trade's councils in their local areas.

C7 Global Solidarity

Congress international work continues to be informed by our Global Solidarity Committee and our affiliation to the ITUC. The Committee now operate on an all-island basis and carries forward the international resolutions passed at the 2023 ICTU BDC.

The Committee has developed a work programme in co-operation with the all- island Congress Global Solidarity Committee. Work with both committees is now more aligned, with NI-only unions now fully participating in meetings, seminars and actions. Dooley Harte is vice- chair of the Congress GS committee alongside Yvonne O'Callaghan as Chair.

The 2023 and 2024 Global Solidarity Summer Schools took place in Armagh City and Limerick and both were attended by over 70 delegates and expert speakers. The 2023 summer school heard speakers from Turkey, Myanmar, Belarus, Tunisia and the ITUC on the state of trade union rights around the world. Sessions on tackling the Far Right and on solidarity with the people and workers of Palestine.

The 2024 school was opened by ICTU President Justin McCamphill, who summarised some of the international work of Congress and affiliates, including Palestine and the violence of the far right in both jurisdictions. Other participants included ETUC General Secretary, Esther Lynch and ICTU General Secretary Owen Reidy.



Esther Lynch briefed the 2024 Global Solidarity Summer School

Delegates also participated in a session on the right to strike, with international legal experts Paapa Danquah, Legal and HTUR Director at ITUC and Jeff Vogt, Rule of Law Director, Solidarity Centre.

Following a comprehensive examination of the dispute on the interpretation of Convention 87 with respect to the right to strike to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) pursuant to article 37(1) of the ILO Constitution. The resolution adopted by the Governing Body expressed serious concern about the implications of the dispute on the functioning of the ILO and the credibility of its system of standards.

This was followed by a workshop aimed at helping trade union and human rights activists hone their skills when talking about Palestine by offering communication tips on engaging in such conversations and building participants' confidence to know how to respond to various arguments.

Sarona Bedwan led this from MAKAN - a Palestinian-led transformative education organisation that strengthens voices for Palestinian rights. MAKAN helps to transform the existing narrative on Palestine-Israel to one that upholds freedom, justice and equality for all by delivering educational workshops and training on Palestine,



ICTU Global Solidarity Committee Chair Ann Piggott (ASTI) at the start of the 2024 GSSS



Briefing on ICTU leadership delegation to Palestine in 2023, at GSSS

creating useful resources and tools for human rights advocates, and connecting people and organisations active on the issue to one another.

Justin McCamphill outlined Congress' thinking on Palestine in recent times. Welcoming the Irish government's recognition of the State of Palestine and calling on the new UK government to do likewise,



Sarona Bedwan, MAKAN



Justice for Colombia's Hasan Dodwell

"It is the view of Congress that recognition needs to be followed by real steps to hold Israel to account for its war crimes against the Palestinian people. We have seen Israeli actions for many years being carried out with impunity and no consequences for the Israeli Government and a continuation of this approach will continue to undermine any possibility of a Palestinian state in reality. It is now time for the Irish Government to implement and enact the Occupied Territories Bill and the Illegal Israeli Settlements Divestment Bill in the Oireachtas."

Dooley Harte (Craigavon TC) also chairs a working group on Just Transition, following a motion on climate action from the 2022 BDC brought by Belfast & District Trades Council. The group is focused upon the 2022 NI Climate Act which establishes a Just Transition Commission for NI which will have stakeholders including representatives from trade unions.



Workshop on anti-racism at GSSS 24

Since the restoration of devolution, this working group has been in briefings with DAERA officials working on establishing the NI Just Transition Commission and is being advised by trade union representatives on similar bodies in Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland.

Congress has developed strong allies among climate activists and has in recent years assisted with the logistics and practicalities for Climate marches each year as part of worldwide COP demonstrations.



C8 Trade Union Friends of Palestine

The work of TUFPP was supported by Eamon McMahon since its foundation in 2005, Eamon's contribution to TUFPP was memorialised in a book edited by Peter Collins launched in September 2024 and was also honoured at the Biennial Conference in Kilkenny 2023 and at the May Day celebrations in Belfast. The affiliates membership of TUFPP continues to grow. The work is supported by the multi-union steering group which meets regularly and with bi-monthly meetings of all affiliates.

Core to the work of TUFPP is building a workplace ambassador base inside unions. All current TUFPP ambassadors have undertaken fact finding missions to the Occupied Palestinian Territories with the promise that they will bear witness on their return. The ambassadors have been incredibly busy over the past two years and in particular in the past 12 months. Their activities have included organising workplace action, pickets, vigils, meetings to promote worker and community boycotts of products such as HP, PUMA and TEVA and continuous participation in marches and rallies. On International Workers Memorial Day 2024 unions came together to plant olive trees in memory of the murdered Palestinians.

TUFPP continue to actively participate in the European Trade Union Network for Justice in Palestine, of which we are a founder member, with ICTU as the first trade union congress to affiliate. TUFPP are contributors to its *Don't Buy Into Occupation* campaign and also to building support across the European trade union network on the issue of justice for Palestine. At the 2023 ETUC Congress in Berlin, ETUN held the first fringe event on Palestine. The 'standing room only' event was chaired by TUFPP chairperson Patricia McKeown and the panel included speakers from Palestine, the TUC and Norwegian trade unions.

Over the past year, as genocide has unfolded in Gaza, on a weekly, sometimes daily basis, TUFPP members and activists across many of our affiliates have been participating in solidarity action with the Palestinian people. Throughout the period, TUFPP has co-sponsored many of the demonstrations with Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Jews for Palestine Ireland and the Palestinian Community itself. In addition, TUFPP chaired, or presented to, a number of public events throughout the period focusing on the promotion of our BDS campaigns and the need to continuously exert pressure on governments to meet their legal obligations under internal law, including sanctions against Israel.

Since our 2022 Biennial Conference TUFPP has driven forward its work on BDS by:

- Supporting unions to adapt motions in favour of apartheid free zones;
- Lobbying for ethical procurement in the public sector;
- Supporting workers who refuse to be complicit by handling goods profiting from genocide or apartheid;





- Producing guidance, support and online tools to enable trade union member to actively participate in BDS campaigns such as TEVA. The tools also link the campaign to relevant Ministers and Government departments in both jurisdictions.

Additionally, TUFPP has been linking worker/ trade union action to community and consumer boycotts by developing training tools and resources that members and affiliates can use to raise awareness and hold employers and pension trustees to account. The trade union work on pensions has been incredibly successful with two major pension schemes disposing of around £81,000,000 of Israeli Government Bonds. One is the Universities Superannuation Scheme, the largest private pension scheme in the UK. The other is the local NILGOSC scheme covering a range of public sector workers in Northern Ireland.

Supported by the Northern Ireland Committee ICTU and, with our counterparts in TUFPP in the South and by the ICTU Executive, TUFPP continues to promote ICTU's strong policy on justice for the Palestinian People. This continues to form its work programme for the coming period.

On International Workers Memorial Day 2024 unions planted olive trees in memory of the murdered Palestinians



C9 Health & Safety

The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland has primary responsibility for workplace safety.

In their annual report for 2022-2023, the HSENI reported 10 fatalities in workplaces within areas that are the responsibility of both HSENI and local councils; this compares to 19 in the previous year.

Agriculture recorded three fatalities, construction one and manufacturing one in the year. These were down from six, four and two respectively.

Despite this encouraging trend, there is no room for complacency either locally or across the world. Globally each year, an estimated 2.78 million workers die from occupational accidents and work-related diseases while an additional 374 million workers suffer from non-fatal occupational accidents. This means almost 2 million people die from work-related causes each year. Workplace-related deaths exceed the average annual deaths from road accidents (999,000), war (502,000), violence (563,000) and HIV/AIDS (312,000).

A safe and healthy working environment — also known as occupational safety and health (OSH) — is the “discipline dealing with the prevention of work-related injuries and diseases, as well as the protection and promotion of the health of workers,” according to the International Labour Organization (ILO). Ultimately, occupational safety and health is the improvement of working conditions and working environments for workers to ensure their safety and health are maintained while working and provide compensation if a work-related injury occurs.

ILO declares Health and Safety a fundamental right

At the 110th session of the International Labour Organisation in 2022, Occupational

Health and Safety was added to the list of fundamental principles and rights at work. This means that all ILO member states commit to protecting health and safety rights at work whether or not they have ratified the relevant ILO Conventions.

Workers Memorial Day (WMD): Remember the dead: Fight for the living

Safe work is a right not a privilege. Workers' Memorial Day, held on 28 April every year, brings together workers and their representatives from all over the world to remember workers who have been killed, seriously injured or made ill whilst doing their jobs.

Workers' Memorial Day is officially recognised by the UK government and is supported in 19 countries worldwide.

Each year Congress works with our affiliated unions to commemorate Workers Memorial Day.

In 2012, Congress and the GMB jointly planted a native cherry tree in the grounds of Stormont Estate to remember a young GMB member who was tragically killed at his workplace. David Layland worked at a BIFFA landfill site when he died in a workplace incident in 2008. Since then we have gathered at the tree to mark this important day and pledge to fight for improved workplace safety and occupational health.



J White and C Murphy at
Workers Memorial Day



Tree planting for Workers Memorial Day

In 2024 the Department for the Economy Minister, Conor Murphy joined trade union leaders and health and safety representatives to lay the wreath at the WMD tree. He was joined by NIC-ICTU Vice Chair and UTU General Secretary Jacquie White. In addressing the gathering, the Minister said:

One of the key pillars of my Economic Vision is the creation of Good Jobs. A

Good Job is also a safe job and my aim is to strengthen my Department's resolve to reduce risks and protect people from serious injuries and death at work. Strengthening Trade Union representation, giving workers a stronger voice and creating the conditions where employers and workers can come together and tackle these challenges is how we will achieve safer working environments and help to achieve my wider economic vision of Good Jobs for all.



Conor Murphy and Jacquie White with MLAs at the WMD tree 2024





C10 Arts and Culture Committee

In February 2024, the NIC-ICTU re-established the Arts and Culture Committee (ACC) to promote, develop and protect the interests of workers in arts and culture sector, and to campaign for an Arts and Culture policy for NI. The ACC will also assist the NIC-ICTU by responding to all issues pertaining to the arts and culture sector.

Alice Adams Lemon, Equity, was elected as Chair of the Committee, and Angela Moffatt, Prospect was elected as Vice Chair. The ACC is open to representatives who work in the arts and culture sector from all affiliated unions.

The ACC considers mechanisms to support professionalism in the sector, including pay, terms and conditions, dignity at work, opportunities for arts workers from every part of the sector and to address the mistreatment, bully and harassment within this industry.



Gerry Murphy addresses addresses an Equity rally for arts funding



Equity's Alice Adams Lemon and Alan McKee





Gerry Murphy made an address in the grounds of Belfast City Hall at the unveiling of the statues

A main element in the work of the ACC has been its support of the campaign for greater finances and support for the sector and recognition of the contribution arts and culture workers make to the cultural, societal, and economic development of NI.

As part of this, the new Committee has responded to a number of consultations including the Arts Council NI 10-Year Strategic Plan 2024-34 consultation.

During the period the long-running campaign to have arts spending closer to the average in RoI, Scotland, Wales or England was boosted by further cutbacks. Equity led a high profile campaign which was supported by NIC-ICTU and affiliates.

Also of note was the unveiling of statues in the grounds of Belfast City Hall to two remarkable Belfast women: Mary Ann McCracken and Winifred Carney.

In March 2024, Gerry Murphy was invited to speak at the unveiling, years after NIC-ICTU called for these memorials to be raised on behalf of working women across this city and the centuries:

I am delighted, as the representative of the trade union movement across this island and particularly as its principal officer in the north to be in attendance today at this hugely significant event.

The two sculptures unveiled today are not only a fitting recognition, at long last, of two of our most important historical female figures but also a reflection of the city as it is now.

I lead a movement which is 200,000 strong across the north and currently 57% of that membership is female. Mary Ann McCracken and Winifred Carney were early pioneers in the battles which have seen women, rightly, assert their rights to equality of opportunity and treatment.

Their examples have thousands of living legacies, in every workplace and all communities across this city.

Mary Ann McCracken was born into a progressive and liberal household during the Enlightenment, an original republican, you might say. She has been described as a "radical humanitarian, a social activist, campaigner and entrepreneur".

She was a feminist before the word was invented.

She was an active supporter of the United Irishmen.

She challenged her class and the merchants of Belfast when she campaigned for the abolition of slavery.

Her concern for the oppressed was spread across the entire social and economic fabric of Belfast from the workhouses to the mills. It included education provision and improving pay and working conditions; she would have made a great shop steward, or a trade union general secretary.

History does not repeat itself, but every now and then it rhymes.

Winifred Carney was born 21 years after Mary-Ann passed on, and her life took her through momentous times and events. Her politics were shaped by the industrial revolution, by the emergence of Irish Nationalism and its Unionist counter, and by the simultaneous global revolt when socialism developed in the minds and hearts of working people from every creed and in every nation, city, mine and mill.

She worked closely with James Connolly at the birth of the modern trade unions across these islands and when that movement for workers power was faced with the greater power of the bosses and the state, be that in Belfast in 1907, or in



Mary Ann McCracken

Dublin in 1913, she joined with Connolly in the Irish Citizens Army, revolutionaries among the rebels in the GPO in 1916.

After that disappointment, she retuned north and continued the work of creating that New Jerusalem for working people as Ireland partitioned and the 'carnival of reaction' Connolly predicted came to pass, on both sides of the border.

And yet no such border existed in her head, or in her heart. Her work with the Irish Transport and General Workers Union, with the Labour Party and with workers'

education. That was the world of resistance to the types of society being forged after partition, and that is where she met her husband, George McBride – a Protestant, a British soldier and former Orangeman

They lived by their principles and loved each other until her passing in 1943. And yet even in death, the sectarianism they confounded was still imposed upon them.

Buried in Milltown she was not allowed to have her husband name (McBride) on her gravestone due to the religious differences. They were married for fifteen years and George McBride never remarried after Carney's early death. A few years ago, the trade union movement paid for and installed a new headstone for both at his grave close to the Somme hospital at Newtownards.

This statue corrects those forced omissions from our common story.

Like Mary Ann, Winifred challenged the conventions of background and class. Each took the political road less taken and both have been thoroughly absolved by history.

Their legacy is all around us, in the faces and stories and attitudes of every woman at this gathering, and in the 57% of the membership of all of our trade unions in the north.

I have little doubt that if both were with us in 2024, both would have been at those front gates of Belfast City Hall on 18 January just past – on the picket lines, making the case for better pay, safer conditions and a society which deserves the humanity of both of these women.

Their statues are metal, but their legacy is human.

Winifred Carney



C11 May Day

The 2023 May Day march and rally boosted the momentum of industrial action, while the 2024 offered the opportunity to celebrate this movement's real achievements over that year. Gerry Murphy welcomed the main speaker at 2023's rally in these words:

"Every trade unionist across these islands, and many outside our movement, have been inspired and encouraged by the wisdom and clarity offered by RMT General Secretary, Mick Lynch. In a series of media interviews which became internet phenomena, Mick ignored attempts to sideline the justified demands of his members by trivial and stereotypical questioning, and instead outlined their just cause for decent pay and working conditions with style and wit."



Mick Lynch addresses the May Day Rally





"By doing so, Mick has assisted trade union representatives from every sector of our economy and society to explain with clarity why so many working people are taking the principled and initially costly decision to vote for strike action. Unions are going on strike who have never previously found themselves forced into doing so. In recent months, we have seen strike action being successful in gaining better pay settlements for workers across the private and public sector.

"This rally will also feature local speakers involved in industrial action across our economy, and will act as a rallying cry for better workers' rights and collective bargaining structures so that all workers can benefit from trade union membership and the power that derives from taking action together across the negotiation table and, when needed, on the picket line."

In 2024, NIC-ICTU Vice-Chair Jacquie White (UTU) chaired speeches from Belfast & District Trades Council's, Kerry Fleck (CWU), Scottish TUC General Secretary, Roz Foyer, ICTU Vice-President, Phil Ni Sheaghda (INMO) and Uniglobal's Regional Secretary, Oliver Roethig

In her remarks to the pre-march rally, Ms White told the participants

Trade unions from across this island and these islands come together on May Day to celebrate their victories and to mark their

setbacks, but we can safely say that this year, trade unionists in NI have never been as strong or influential. This follows months of industrial action and strikes and lobbying for the interests of all working people.

We demanded better and we are not going back. That demand for better was heard loud and clear across the north in recent months.

Workers across the north at every level of our economy and in every sector of employment took industrial action. We have seen unions who have never taken such action before. We have seen what NI looks like when those services are withdrawn by strike action. Now those workers are more visible and now is the time for those workers to be recognised with a new and comprehensive Employment Act.

We are the only devolved government with devolved powers to improve laws affecting workers rights. And we are preparing for such a piece of Legislation with the restored NI Executive and Assembly.

We will soon place our proposals on the table and we urge trade unionists to support our demands for a better deal for parents, for safer workplaces and for workers to have access to join a union and benefit like workers all over the world do who are in unions.



Speakers at the 2023 rally



This is the end of Ireland’s first Trade Union week. But the example of what every union in Northern Ireland delivered in the past few months is the best advertisement.

Workers in all jobs are better off in a trade union. The whole economy is better off with stronger unions.

Society needs us so we can play our part in building a bigger and better society.

Happy May Day!



Unite's Susan Fitzgerald



STUC's Roz Foyer



ICTU Vice-President Phil Ni Sheaghda



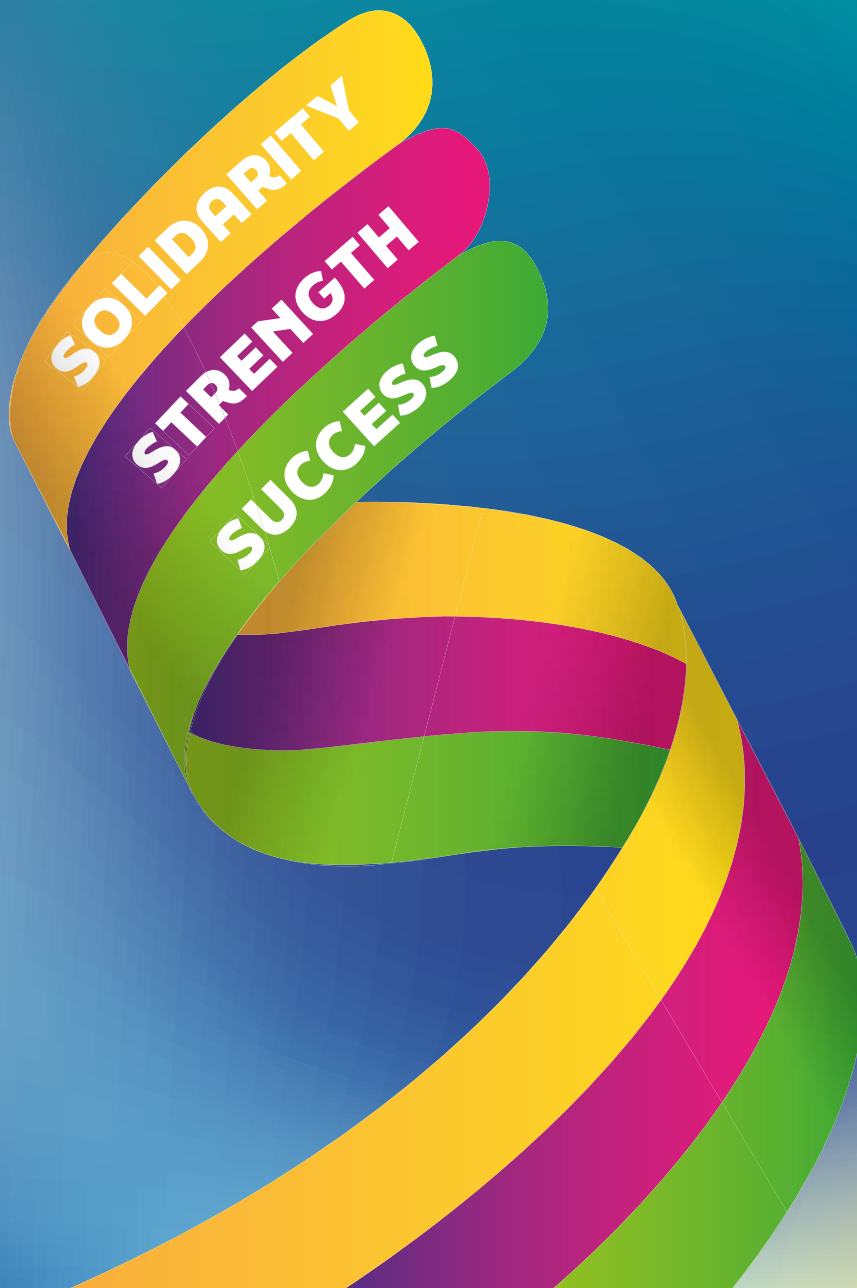
Uniglobal's Oliver Roethig





Section D

TRADE UNION EDUCATION



BDC24

D1 The Trade Union Education Programme

The NIC-ICTU Trade Union Education Programme (TUEP) is a vital resource for all trade union officials, representatives, and members. It provides a forum for trade unionists to come together to develop their knowledge and skills, and to learn from the experiences of others.

Around one thousand learners participate in the training and seminars offered by NIC-ICTU each year.

Value of TUEP

Academic studies show that professionally trained union reps make a real difference in workplaces. They improve workers' terms of pay and conditions; protect members and jobs; ensure safer working environments; promote equality, wellbeing, fairness, and social cohesion; and enable access to skills, training, and development.

TUEP ensures that reps are fully up to date with developments in employment and case law as well as advances in workplace best practice. TUEP courses provide reps with the opportunity to consider how to respond to latest developments in the workplace and the dangers of insecure work. In addition to this TUEP provides reps with the skills to utilise new methods of communication to enhance organising opportunities.

Safety and Wellbeing

The presence of well-trained union Health and Safety Reps prevents thousands of major injuries at work every year. The more trade union training the reps get, the more marked the "union safety effect." Trained reps are at the forefront when it comes to addressing the new hazards of the 21st century. According to an HSE evaluation, trade union safety training is "an important stimulus for taking up 'new issues' in

health and safety." It found, for example, gender sensitive strategies, stress surveys, representing workers offsite, participatory risk assessment and work organisation.

Equality and Social Inclusion

Building equality and social inclusion is another key priority for TUEP that runs through all aspects of the programme. TUEP training and learning prepares representatives to play a key role in:

- Promoting equal rights in the workplace. Reps consider how to progress the equality agenda in the workplace through campaigns and by working with employers to develop and update policies and procedures that advance equality and inclusion.
- Building inclusion. Reps are encouraged to create a supportive union atmosphere in the workplace through which the members feel that they can participate fully and that their opinions are valued.
- Challenging harassment and discrimination. Reps gain the knowledge and skills to ensure that complaints are dealt with effectively and efficiently.
- Acting as a role model in treating everyone fairly.

Further to this, TUEP has helped build social cohesion by providing employment rights training for BAME and migrant workers. The TUEP Disability Champions course provides information and skills to help improve access, opportunity, and equality for people with disabilities in the workplace.

New Developments

TUEP now offer a *Digital Organising* course which helps reps and official with:

- Identifying the best methods of digital communication.
- Understanding and utilising social media platforms.

- Demographics and data analytics.
- Developing a communications strategy and content.
- Creating creative content to build membership and maximise members engagement.
- Supporting campaigns.
- Getting the union message into the media.

Trade unions have always been at the forefront of the drive for equality and inclusion at work, whether through the struggle for equal pay, through tackling sectarianism, racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of prejudice. Another new course TUEP offers looks at all aspects of inequality in the workplace, including social and economic, and focuses on developing strategies to effect positive change. This course aimed at experienced reps and officials aims to:

- Strengthen knowledge of equality issues in the workplace
- Promote an understanding of union values and policies on equalities
- Explains the legal framework of the right to equality.
- Examines the roots of racism, sexism, and sectarianism.
- Challenge prejudice, including racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination and harassment.
- Consider social and economic inequality, including precarious employment and low pay.
- Critically analyse equality law and workplace policies.
- Examine how to use legislation to effect positive change in the workplace and wider society.
- Understand how to use union structures and strategies in working for equality.
- Develop campaigns to improve equality, build and engage union membership.

As union representatives are more effective if they possess up-to-date skills and knowledge relevant to their role TUEP are now offering opportunities for 'repeat' or 'refresher' training in a range of accredited courses.

For further information or if you wish to enquire about arranging bespoke courses for your union please contact the NIC-ICTU Education Officer at kevin.doherty@ictuni.net

About the Programme

TUEP contains progression pathways for union officials, union representatives, health and safety representatives, equality representatives, union learning representatives and members. All courses are accredited through Open College Network (OCN). On successful completion learners will obtain level 2, or 3 Awards, Certificates, or Diplomas. The courses are free and are run mainly on a day release basis over 3, 5, 10 or 32 days depending on the level of qualification attached to the course. Evening courses are also available.

The programme is delivered in partnership with the South Eastern Regional College (SERC) and OCN NI.

The NIC-ICTU Education Department also designs and delivers bespoke courses to meet the needs of affiliates which can be run in affiliates offices, the workplace and other locations.

The NIC-ICTU Education Programme continues to develop with a number of new courses added to the programme reflecting demand from affiliates and changes in the workplace and society.

Course Delivery

The majority of TUEP courses are delivered in the classroom, or through a hybrid model, and some are delivered online. The method of delivery is continuously reviewed to meet the need. To meet demand, TUEP also run online evening courses.

Accredited Courses

TUEP offers the following core union reps courses:

Certificate courses:

- Trade Union Reps Stage 1
- Trade Union Reps Stage 2
- Certificate in Employment Law
- Health and Safety Stage 1
- Health and Safety Stage 2
- Union Learning Reps

Diploma Courses:

- Employment Law
- Occupational Health and Safety

In addition, TUEP offer a further and developing range of accredited courses, including:

- Challenging Inequalities
- Ensuring Safe Workplaces
- Working from Home
- Dealing with Stress
- Bullying and Intimidating Behaviour in the Workplace
- Negotiation and Communication Skills
- Handling Grievance and disciplines
- Disability Champions
- Pay and Bargaining
- Equality Law
- Tackling Prejudice in the Workplace
- Digital Organising
- Equality Reps in the Workplace
- Confidence in the Workplace
- Climate Crisis and the Workplace
- Dealing with Redundancies
- Mental Health and the workplace
- Learning and Organising
- Taking a Case to Tribunals

- Menopause and the workplace
- Campaigning
- Hybrid Working.

Further details can be found at

<https://www.ictuni.org/events>

Webinars and Seminars

NIC-ICTU also run a variety of unaccredited seminars on various employment related issues. Some of seminars are delivered in partnership with affiliate unions, the Nevin Economic Institute, Belfast City of Sanctuary, the Labour Relations Agency, and the Equality Commission. Seminars are delivered through webinars and in person. The topics include:

- Bullying and harassment in the Workplace
- Multi-ethnic workplaces
- European developments on Employment Law
- Agency Workers Directive
- Dignity at Work
- Flexible Working
- Mental Health in the Workplace
- Disability Law in the Workplace
- Legislative Reform
- Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace
- Leadership in the Workplace
- Agency Workers Directive
- Health and Safety
- Challenging Racism
- Pregnancy and Maternity rights
- Menopause and the Workplace
- Family Friendly workplaces
- Managing Conflict at Work

Further details can be found at

<https://www.ictuni.org/seminars-webinars>

D2 Union Learning Fund

Under an agreement with the Department for the Economy, NIC-ICTU continues to have full responsibility for the administrative and financial management of the Union Learning Fund (ULF). In January 2023, applications were sought for a new three year project plan. The following twelve project applications to the ULF were successful:

During the 2022-2024 reporting period, ULF projects engaged with and supported more than 8,500 workers. Outcomes achieved included:

- 550 workplace learners completed Essential Skills courses in Numeracy, Literacy, or IT.
- 2,625 workplace learners completed and achieved various upskilling qualifications.
- 170 migrant workers completed OET, IELTS training or ESOL qualifications.
- 3,500 workplace learners completed Continued Professional Development (CPD) courses.

- 400 workplace learners completed introductory IT courses.
- Projects supported 1,075 workers with CV writing and interview skills.

Supporting Union Learning Representatives (ULRs)

From 2022 to present, 52 ULRs have completed the Union Learning Representatives training course through the NIC-ICTU Education Program. To support these newly trained ULRs in their role NIC-ICTU produced a new ULR Handbook: *Union Learning Representatives, Your Rights, Your Opportunities*.



UNION	Project Title
AEGIS	Learn with Aegis NI
BFAWU	Retraining & Upskilling for Sustainable Employment
EQUITY	Working on Film & TV in Ireland
FBU	Promoting Lifelong Learning in the Fire Service
FDA	Early Career Leaders – Professional Development in the NI Civil Service
FSU	FSU Future Skills
INTO	Upskilling & Retraining Teachers
NIPSA	NIPSA Union Learn 2023/2026
UNISON	K102/OET/IELTS & Supporting Teaching and Learning
UNITE Construction	Building for the Future
UNITE	United in Learning
USDAW	Developing a Learning & Skills Strategy for a Sustainable Future



Union Learning Conference

In March 2023, the annual Union Learning Conference was held in The Mac, Belfast. More than 50 ULRs attended and heard from key speakers addressing the theme, 'New Opportunities for Union Learning'. As part of a joint initiative, Maggie Bates of The Open University in Ireland (The OU) and NIC-ICTU launched a free online learning hub aimed at providing valuable education resources to workers and their families.



The ICTU Learning Hub offers a variety of courses, articles and videos, covering subjects such as digital skills, employability, health & social care, and essential skills in English and maths. The courses are designed to be flexible, allowing learners to



John D'Arcy, OU



Attendees at the 2024 Union Learning Conference

study at their own pace and fit their learning around their work and family commitments.

Addressing the conference, John D'Arcy, Director of The Open University in Ireland, said, "We are delighted to partner with NIC-ICTU to offer free online learning opportunities to workers across Northern Ireland. Education and skills are key to improving people's lives and increasing their employment opportunities. With the online learning hub, we aim to provide accessible, high-quality learning resources to workers across Northern Ireland, regardless of their background or experience."



Speakers at 2024 UL conference with Foyle MLAs Padraig Delargy and Sinead McLaughlin





Union Learn Project Managers at Open University event.



Graeme Wilkinson, Director of Skills, Dept for the Economy

In March 2024, the Union Learning Conference was held for the first time in the North West at the Ebrington Hotel, Derry. Over 80 ULRs attended and guests included MLAs, Pádraig Delargy, Sinn Féin and Sinead McLaughlin, SDLP, who serve on the NI Assembly Economy Committee.

The speakers from the Department for the Economy, North West Regional College, The Open University, Derry City & Strabane District Council and the Nevin Economic Research Institute addressed the theme, 'Skills for a Transforming Economy'.

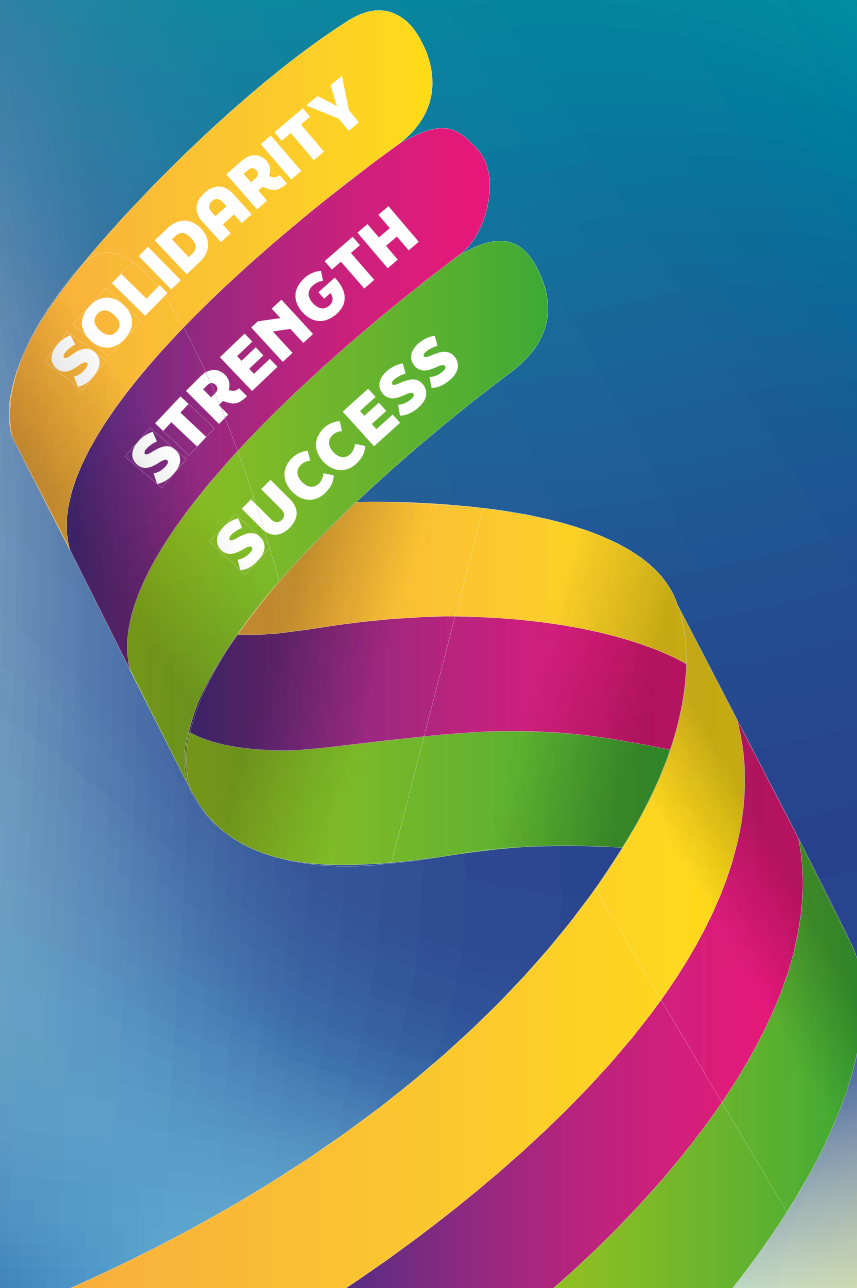


USDAW learners and UL reps



Section E

POLITICAL & ECONOMIC REPORT



BDC24

E1 TWIN TRACK – From campaigning & strikes to restoration and the NI Employment Bill

Back in November 2022, when the pandemic-delayed '2022' NIC-ICTU BDC was hosted in Enniskillen, the theme of the conference was *Workers Demand Better*, the name of the unified trade union campaign launched in Stormont a month earlier, in response to the cost-of-living crisis. Launching the campaign at Stormont was also appropriate as we needed serious political solutions to challenging economic problems.

The key campaign messages for politicians and the public were agreed with the full engagement of unions representing workers in the private and public sectors and included:

- Government support and resources to households, (prioritising those on fixed incomes and low to middle incomes) to assist with the cost of energy bills.
- Pay improvements in each sector, along with a state supported social wage.
- Government engagement with the trade union movement to implement the



Workers Demand Better first public meeting in January 2023



progressive policies to support workers and their families. The implementation of the policies contained within *No Going Back - a New Deal towards a safe and secure future for all*.

- A robust NI Employment Bill that promotes workers' rights and stronger collective bargaining, leading to better pay, which includes key elements of the recent EU Directive on an Adequate Minimum Wage, as a centrepiece in any Programme for Government of the NI Executive.

While the Northern Ireland Committee's attention was mainly focused on political like in Northern Ireland,, the wider context of chaos and paralysis emanating from 10 Downing Street was inescapable. After the sordid end of the premiership of Boris Johnson, Liz Truss did an even worse job for 44 days before being removed after costing the economy billions in her fantasy budget. Owen Reidy commented on her departure that:

Northern Ireland and its people do not deserve to be collateral damage of internecine Tory feuding. We have had our election, and that mandate from spring 2022 ought to be honoured by all parties in Northern Ireland. Our best insurance against



West Belfast meeting of
Workers Demand Better campaign

the contagion of chaos from Westminster and Downing Street is stable devolved government in Northern Ireland, accountable to the people of Northern Ireland.

In December, Gerry Murphy succeeded Owen as ICTU Assistant General Secretary, as Owen commenced his duties at ICTU General Secretary.

One of Gerry's first public outings as AGS was at an open meeting in the Guildhall, Derry to discuss proposed changes at BBC Radio Foyle. The gathering of 250 people, including trade unionists, community activists, public representatives, and church leaders was hosted by the Mayor of Derry and Strabane District Council and was a striking illustration of the value placed on BBC Radio Foyle by listeners within its vast catchment area.

NIC-ICTU supports the campaign of opposition to the proposed cuts to BBC Northern Ireland. The need for comprehensive news and business coverage cannot be overstated. Derry and the North-West is a distinct region and the reasons for the establishment of BBC Radio Foyle remain valid more than four decades later.

We support our affiliate unions, the NUJ and BECTU, in their bid to protect local radio and in particular to secure the future of BBC Radio Foyle rooted in the community.

Lobbying on that issue continued for several months and the pettiness of the 'saving' resonated with the public alongside the similarly mean-spirited attitudes towards public sector workers whose frozen salaries were being denuded by spiralling inflation. Budgets were being trimmed and shrunk across all services.

Unions representing affected workers held the first in what would become a series of public rallies in February in support of striking workers in health and education, with more such events following as every part of the public sector was tested by this latest round of austerity.

That February also marked half-a-year since Unite members working in the NI Housing Executive started their strike for a decent pay settlement.

The strike by the union's approximately 300 members working at the agency commenced in September after management failed to make any offer whatsoever to improve pay and meet the pay claim of Unite members.

In the midst of a homelessness crisis, there were 193 social housing units in the affected areas lying empty despite having 'live tickets' issued for work to change their tenancy. In addition, more than 4,400 repair and maintenance jobs judged to be 'emergency' were left undone and a further 9,600 works deemed routine had not been completed. 246 adaptation jobs needed by disabled tenants were also outstanding.

Gerry Murphy met the striking Unite members and discussed with their officials, Susan Fitzgerald and Jackie Pollock the failure of the NI Housing Executive to extend a fair pay increase and bring about

the end of the strike and the impact it was having on social housing tenants.

The longer term politics were marked as ICTU's leadership reflected upon the 25th anniversary of the Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement. Gerry Murphy reiterated that: *The support we pledged in 1998 is still in place. The Agreement remains the roadmap to a decent future for all.*

Strike action was taken in every NI school on 26 April, as five unions representing teachers and principals took action for better wages and respect from their employers. Like those unions taking action recently in the Health service, teachers had no minister with which to negotiate. As an indication of the strong feelings among all levels in education, for the first time in its 100 year existence, the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) were out on strike. On the same day, civil servants took strike action in response to a pay offer which was far below the spikes in the cost of living over the last year. This affected every devolved government department as well as UK-wide services such as passports and customs.

NIC-ICTU organised a major lunchtime rally at Belfast City Hall with speakers from striking unions: PCS; Unite; INTO; UTU; GMB; NIPSA; NASUWT; NAHT; UNISON. On the same week several other unions, including Unison, continued taking Action Short of Strike Action in the NHS, local government, road services and schools.

Three days later RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch addressed the 2023 May Day march and shared the support of trade unionists across GB for the actions being taken by NI unions.

In April, the Secretary of State for NI Chris Heaton-Harris announced a draft budget for 2023-4, in which Northern Ireland's Barnett Consequentials Assistant General Secretary debt repayments to the UK government. Gerry Murphy commented:

This budget will have an immediate impact on the thousands of workers who took industrial action this week to seek a fair days pay for a fair days work. It means that if the UK government ever do decide to make a reasonable pay offer to public sector unions in the rest of the UK, the same will be denied to hard-pressed public-sector workers in Northern Ireland.

This is such an obvious injustice, it is difficult to see how any of these pay disputes will be resolved for our hard-pressed workers in Health, Education, and across our public services. There is an additional cruel irony that the very people delivering government services in the absence of political leadership from the NI Assembly and Executive, are the first to be punished.

This is simply not sustainable, and cannot be imposed without creating long-term harm for people. There are a hundred human stories which illustrate this, but we can mention one, the Hospital Parking Charges Act which has not only implications for thousands of healthcare workers.

This is legislation passed by all-party votes in the last session of the NI Assembly. That laws passed are so vulnerable to fit an accountant's requirement, makes a mockery of the spirit and letter of the Agreement and the choices made by the electorate.

In May, the Permanent Secretary in the Department of Health announced that NI health workers would not receive the below inflation pay award offered to their exact equivalents in England. He described his dilemma as 'an impossible position of being asked to fulfil conflicting responsibilities'.

In addition, efforts to relieve the worst NHS waiting lists anywhere in the UK were seemingly unaffordable. Neither could we afford, we were told, provision for 920 children with Special Educational Needs.



In Armagh later that summer, trade union leaders representing working people in all professions and occupations met to discuss the ongoing squeeze faced by everyone in Northern Ireland compounded by inadequate and insulting pay offers and the financial decisions of the NI Secretary of State Chris Heaton-Harris MP.

Speaking after the meeting, ICTU Assistant General Secretary Gerry Murphy said

The Secretary of State is punishing workers and service users while acting as if he is taking on a recalcitrant political class who refuse to take responsibility themselves in Stormont. This is a cop-out and an abdication of his responsibility when he is de facto direct ruler.

Every single day brings some petty act of penny pinching in the name of fiscal responsibility. The news headlines

are a depressing drumbeat of bad decisions: 'Patients waiting for days in Emergency Department'; 'No money for health staff pay rises in NI'; 'Funding for primary school nurture classes being cut'; 'Top civil servant says departments have reached cuts limit'; 'One in six people face hunger in Northern Ireland'

We reject the rationale of an alleged 'overspend' which must be corrected. The Northern Ireland Fiscal Council stated in their report on public finances in March 2023 that the vast majority of the overspend was made up of 'pay awards, energy prices and other inflationary pressures'. Inescapable pressures rather than new funding commitments were to blame for the excess of spend. After more than a decade of Tory cuts our society needs more public funding, not less and we will fight to secure the necessary finances to properly fund workers and provide decent public services.



Public sector unions meeting Finance Minister Caoimhe Archibald in spring 2024

Northern Ireland departments were set up to fail. They faced massive increases in prices, much smaller increases in resources and also lacked a functioning NI Executive to monitor and redistribute in-year spending. The idea that Northern Ireland needs to be collectively punished for any of these local political circumstances is as erroneous as it is insulting.

In September, the unions launched 'Smart Money: Better Options for NI's Public Finances', detailed proposals for dealing with the short-term issue of the NI budget and also setting out a medium-term plan for ambitious investment and reforms to drive better delivery of public services for every citizen. *Smart Money* argued for progress to realign our economy to achieve fiscal sustainability. This was summarised into four steps:

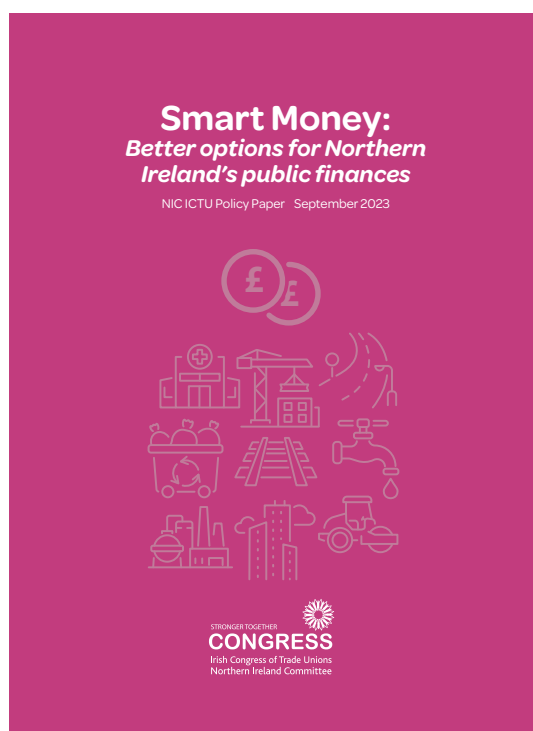
- The need to drop the debt that is currently crippling our finances;
- A mechanism to enable real transformation of public services;
- The replacement of the redundant Barnett formula;
- Fundamental changes to tax to be taken at Westminster.

Smart Money was extensively promoted to politicians and media commentators and received widespread praise for its clear and realistic analysis and proposals. In particular, many NI political parties utilised arguments in the document as they engaged in talks aimed at restoring the institutions at Stormont. The real target for change was the unaccountable Secretary of State who rarely consulted local parties and never directly engaged with trade unions except for occasional complaints about 'all those strikes'. *Smart Money* made clear where the weakest link was, and Gerry Murphy did not mince his words:

The Secretary of State is selling us a pup. NI devolved departments were not irresponsible or too generous. Instead of 'super-parity', we have a real problem with 'sub-parity' issues, particularly in the areas of childcare and apprenticeships.

The devolution of further revenue raising powers has been suggested as another route to help get Northern Ireland's public finances onto a more sustainable path. There are no magic bullets in devolved taxation. Having power to raise or lower certain taxes carries its own risks.

There must be no more quick fixes. We propose instead a new Transformation fund for the type of reforms required for our NHS and other public services. This would be separate from the Block Grant



and would involve Stormont departments submitting bids for specific reform projects to HM Treasury. Therefore this avoids making the same mistakes of previous deals where funding for long term problems was granted on a short-term basis.

In the medium term, NI should have a funding settlement established on a needs-based system that ensures public services match those available elsewhere in the UK.

The part Westminster can play is outlined in ICTU's 2020 'No Going Back' report which highlighted the fact that in the UK, there are significant areas of under-taxation. Closing these gaps would potentially make available significant amounts of money for investment in public services.

In November Secretary of State Chris Heaton-Harris made comments which were misleading at worst and disingenuous at best.

The Secretary of State sets the budget for Northern Ireland. That budget determines the parameters of the negotiations on public sector pay. Even the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Finance reinforced this when he published the derisory offer on civil service pay in January. Gerry Murphy said that he wished 'the pay offer could have gone much further' but that he was constrained by the very difficult 'budgetary position'.

There was another strike rally on 22 September, featuring health workers, FE lecturers, journalists and civil servants. Unions represented included NIPSA, NUJ, Unite, Unison, GMB, UCU, RCM, SoR, CSP.

In November union leaders met to discuss the pressures faced by everyone in Northern Ireland compounded by derisory

pay offers and the financial decisions of the NI Secretary of State. A strategy was agreed which would see a series of public events and interventions, alongside developing industrial action which was emerging across the public sector.

This report is an opportunity to pause and reflect on the unprecedented industrial action which was taking place across Northern Ireland over this period. At the ICTU BDC in Kilkenny, Gerry Murphy outlined the scale of the mobilisation to almost 1,000 delegates from across the island:

Workers across the north at every level of our economy and in every sector of employment have been forced to take industrial action. We have seen:

- *Sea farers, classroom assistants, aircraft engineers.*
- *Bakers, postal workers, internet installers.*
- *School principals, border guards, librarians.*
- *Ground staff, firefighters, university professors.*
- *Nurses, radio journalists, shipping clerks.*
- *Metallurgists, security guards, tractor makers.*
- *Housing maintainers, van drivers, postal deliverers*
- *Care workers, dock workers, youth workers, social workers, council workers, thousands and thousands of decent, honest, frustrated, impoverished workers are standing up and being counted.*

In December, as political talks at Hillsborough castle, the UK government made an offer of a 'package'. The trade union movement responded with ICTU AGS saying:

Northern Ireland needs sustainable public finances, not quick fixes. Workers and their families cannot wait indefinitely for a positive outcome from political talks at Hillsborough, but any settlement has to acknowledge the scale of the crisis that we have been brought into. Public services are facing collapse, family incomes are at breaking point and we need an honest policy response. These issues did not arise overnight and the solutions required must be significant and enduring. While the UK government has finally begun to accept the scale of the problem, it is clear from their proposed financial offer that they have a lot left to learn.

- We welcome the acceptance that public sector pay has been cut and needs to be restored.
- We welcome the acceptance that Northern Ireland public services are currently underfunded.
- We welcome the acceptance that transforming public services requires investment.

However, acceptance of a problem was not sufficient. Gerry Murphy added "We need adequate solutions. It was clear that the financial offer being made by the UK government fell well short of what is required."

ICTU policy analysis outlined what was required for the longer term:

- Public sector pay is a recurring expenditure. Offering 1 year funding to meet public sector pay requirements is not only shortsighted, it is financially irresponsible.
- The Secretary of State should release funding for payments this fiscal year, as a confidence-building measure.

- A fiscal floor is about providing public services in Northern Ireland on the same basis as the rest of the UK. This cannot simply be achieved by setting an arbitrary limit on public spending.
- Transforming public services is an on-going process and the financial commitment must match the scale of what is being proposed.
- A stabilisation fund is welcome, but such a fund can only fulfill its purpose if the longer term settlement is sustainable.

Later in December came the announcement of 18 January strikes, as individual disputes were co-ordinated into a 'Generalised Day of Action'. Gerry Murphy said:

Workers in Northern Ireland cannot be held hostage by this process any longer. The Secretary of State has accepted that public sector pay needs to be settled and has admitted that he has the money to settle it. A worker's pay is not some bauble to be dangled in a political negotiation. This money must be made available to settle these disputes now.

The financial package outlined during this talks process represents a necessary shift in the UK government's attitude, but it does not appear that it will be sufficient. We want to see the restoration of the NI Executive so that we can begin to bring some stability to public services here.

In the absence of any movement on these issues, Trade Unions in Northern Ireland have no option but to intensify our programme of industrial action. The next step will be generalised day of action on the 18th of January bringing together all workers currently in dispute.

As January began Chris Heaton-Harris MP, remained unwilling to even speak to the trade union leadership. Our offer of talks went unacknowledged, and this snub was widely reported.

The moral case for fair pay had been conceded by Mr Heaton-Harris when he accepted that essential public servants deserve an increase. He confirmed he had the money available to make the necessary payments. Yet he refused to release the necessary funds.

His perverse reasoning seemed to be that these salaries were a matter for the NI Executive and the local civil service to sort out with their employees. Also that by withholding the funds to pay the increases he could generate sufficient political pressure on MLAs and Ministers to force those refusing to return back into the Executive. This was an ill-judged and cynical attempt to manipulate these workers and society more generally.

On the eve of the 18 January strikes, the head of the NI Civil Service Jayne Brady called for funds to be released for pay to stop the strike action being pursued and said "there is an urgent need to provide an immediate budget allocation."

This had been the position of the trade union movement from the beginning of these disputes. It is also the position of every NI political party. The trade union movement had won the popular argument, as witnessed the support from women's groups, the voluntary sector, students' unions, the 50 Chief Executives in the public sector, the PSNI Chief Constable as well as the head of the NICS and the public at large.

The strikes and rallies were demonstrations of industrial and public solidarity on a scale never seen before in this place. Each industrial dispute had been mandated by the votes of trade union members. Every stage of this campaign for fair pay and better budgets from accountable local political institutions, has had the input of small and large trade unions. Unions worked with every political party to ensure that our message was clearly understood and our economic analysis was appreciated by all sides.



NIC-ICTU delegation with Kier Starmer in Jan 2023

Within days, the money had been unlocked and the locally accountable parties had resolved remaining issues sufficiently to return to the NI Executive.

February 5 saw the publication of a letter from the restored NI Executive to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, Gerry Murphy said

It is clear to us that the money is now available to settle pay claims across the entire public sector. The financial package makes available money for public sector pay this year and also provides further funding allocations to deal with both outstanding pay issues and reform measures such as re-grading. Speaking after a meeting with the Minister for Finance Caoimhe Archibald. Mr. Murphy added;

The minister made clear to us that public sector pay was an immediate priority for her and her department. We welcome the Minister's commitment to settle these disputes as quickly and comprehensively as possible.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions stands united and firm in our collective industrial action. That action has successfully brought us to the point where we can resolve these issues. However, we are also clear that that industrial action will continue until we receive proposals from relevant departments and agencies that workers can accept.

On February 15, the Minister for Finance, Dr Caoimhe Archibald, announced that an allocation of £685m had been made available to departments to allow them to begin pay negotiations with public sector trade unions. Gerry Murphy commented:

While we welcome the prospect of settling disputes for this year, we are clear that public sector pay is not a one-off issue. Public services do not exist without the necessary funding for public sector pay. Paying staff must never again be seen as an optional extra.

E2 Democracy at Work – Participation, lobbying, legislation

In March 2024 NIC-ICTU launched a new document in the Long Gallery at Parliament Buildings, with Conor Murphy MLA who agreed to 'sponsor' the event before becoming Minister for the Economy.

As well as Minister Murphy, the event heard contributions from senior trade unionists and academics from NI, GB and the EU, including:

- Esther Lynch, the General Secretary of the ETUC,
- Shavanah Taj, General Secretary of the Wales TUC,
- Dr Lisa Wilson of the Nevin Economic Research Institute,
- Gerry Murphy, Assistant General Secretary of ICTU.

The event was chaired by Paddy Mackel, chair of NIC-ICTU.

The new policy paper, *Democracy at Work Social Dialogue and the Tripartite Model* is intended to dovetail with Smart Money:



Democracy At Work launch in Stormont with Economy and Finance ministers



Better options for Northern Ireland's public finances, launched last summer and which helped inform the debates around the revival of the Stormont institutions. The aims of the policy paper can be summarised with these three objectives:

1. Introduce the case for a social dialogue model including trade unions as equal partners, common among administrations across Europe and in these islands.
2. To recall that a form of social dialogue, the 'tripartite model', served us all well at an earlier time of crisis, during the 'troubles' and the more recent Covid pandemic. However, that inclusive model has gradually eroded with trade unions pushed to the sidelines.
3. To highlight the undermining of the tripartite model on crucial non-departmental public bodies, such as the HSENI, and Tribunals.

Trade unions saw this event as the initial honouring of a pledge made in late 2019 in the New Decade New Approach agreement, which committed to *"creating good jobs and protecting workers' rights... where workers have a voice that provides a level of autonomy, a decent income, security of tenure, satisfying work in the right quantities and decent working conditions..."*

Addressing an audience of MLAs, trade unionists and leaders of government departments, agencies and public bodies, Gerry Murphy asserted that greater social dialogue:

- Leads to better policy making because it is informed by knowledge and experience from all social partners.
- It democratises the policy making process enhancing its legitimacy and a sense of ownership.

- It increases transparency and trust in new policies making them easier to implement with widespread support.
- It helps mitigate inequities and ensures representation of communities who are often shut out of the process.
- It ensures that we can have economic growth while also creating a more equitable work environment.
- It breeds cooperation which in turn nurtures innovation and productivity and better working conditions for all.
- It reduces power imbalances in our labour markets which helps to alleviate and ultimately avoid conflicts and disputes.

We are here to represent working people and make a positive contribution to the building of a better future for everyone.

We believe that the social dialogue is the way to capture our experience and knowledge. Together we can make a real difference and that is what this paper is about.

As well as this, NIC-ICTU facilitated meetings between relevant ministers and trade unions in order to negotiate settlements to the wide range of disputes, and at the time of going to press, most had been satisfactorily resolved. A key meeting was held with the Finance minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald in May 2024 with all of the unions representing public sector workers who had taken industrial action.

There were further positive developments in early summer when a General Election was called, with the promise of changed circumstances across the UK as well as locally. The NIC-ICTU discussed and agreed that certain policy areas needed to be highlighted to assist with the serious public conversation during the election period, all matters which we have long advocated, based on motions passed at our delegate conferences over the years, and from across the democratic structures of NIC-ICTU.



Completing B/GFA & honouring commitment to Bill of Rights

The trade union movement has been unwavering in its call for the full implementation of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement since its endorsement in the 1998 referendum, including the Bill of Rights.

Rather than attacking human rights by threatening to withdraw the Human Rights Act and leave the ECHR, we called on the UK Government to fulfil its obligation under the B/GFA by taking a Bill of Rights to completion via Westminster legislation.

Scrapping the Legacy Act and return to principles of Stormont House agreement

We agree with victims organisations such as WAVE, who say that these proposals clearly conflict with the duty on the UK under the European Convention on Human Rights to effectively investigate unlawful death and torture, and that these proposals will undermine the Human Rights Act and the rule of law.

Promoting tax justice and fairness to fund proper public services

In any modern state with locally elected mayors and accountable assemblies, there is significant room for manoeuvre for various kinds of local taxes to raise or lower – income, property, carbon, consumption, tourism, etc. As the NI Fiscal Commission found, what options there are will make very little difference.

ICTU's 2020 No Going Back report highlighted that fact that in the UK, one of the largest gaps in tax was in social insurance contribution and in particular those levied on employers. This gap remains significant and it is estimated that if employer social insurance contributions were to rise to meet the average of our European peers, it would raise an extra £90



DUP chair of NI Assembly Economy Committee Philip Brett

billion in the UK. For Northern Ireland, this would result in an extra £2.6 billion in revenue generated annually.

Action on climate change and a Just Transition to Net Zero

Workers need to be empowered in the process of change that is needed to transition to a sustainable, post-carbon economy. There are huge opportunities – in terms of jobs and skills from such a transition – but there are also huge risks and threats. Workers cannot be side-lined from shaping the economic transition, instead they must play a central and deciding role. It is vital that the trade union movement, in particular those representing the trade unions representing workers in industries which will face the greatest change, is centrally involved in securing a truly Just Transition.

Improved relations with EU

We backed the Windsor Framework as something which can mitigate the worst effects of Brexit on trade and jobs. After years of nationalist bluster, NI needs a Westminster government which is willing to

talk seriously about improving relations with whom we share a land border, hopefully negotiating deals on (say) phytosanitary standards that will make much of the Irish Sea border irrelevant.

Change hostile environment towards asylum seekers

People fleeing war need safe and legal routes to reach asylum, and our ageing population can benefit from their skills, as the 'native' labour force declines. It is possible to be both humane to others and self-interested for our futures and the health of our economy, not to mention the social and cultural benefits of a more pluralist society.

Recognition of the State of Palestine

Congress welcomed the historic recognition of the State of Palestine by Ireland as "a very welcome development, as it clearly affirms the right of Palestinians to self-determination in a sovereign Palestinian state". Congress also supports stronger action by the international community to hold Israel's extremist government to account for its reprehensible actions over many decades, while also opposing the violence of Hamas. However, if the UK

Government wants to join the dozens of states around the world who recognise the state of Palestine as a diplomatic reality with a place of the global stage, that would be a dramatic improvement of the rhetoric and support from recent UK governments for the criminal actions of the Netanyahu government.

Commit to better workers' rights in NI and across GB

Over the last few years, the trade union movement in NI has been able to win a better deal on key employment rights compared to changes implemented in Britain by the Conservative/Coalition Governments. Workers here still have employment rights that are significantly better than the rights enjoyed by our trade union brothers and sisters in the rest of the UK. Workers rights are at the core of our engagement in the developing debate on the future of the island of Ireland and our determination to ensure that the voice of working people is accurately represented.

We want a new Westminster government to scrap the Tory anti-trade union legislation and create a new framework for workers and their unions in England, Wales and Scotland.

With the return of the NI Executive and Assembly the potential exists for us to lobby and get improvements to employment rights in Northern Ireland. We are determined to see a transformed environment for working people, with collective bargaining at the centre of industrial relations.

The whole of society benefits from people at work having access to a union, and unions having access to workers. The international evidence is clear, and there is widespread acceptance that when workers have a strong voice in workplaces, that collective voice works for not only for the individual benefit of each worker with better pay and conditions but also



Alliance MP Sorcha Eastwood and Economy spokesperson David Honeyford

for a wider, fairer, and more productive economy. New legislation is key to building this new economy. The ICTU is determined to work with Government and employers towards this common purpose.

After Labour's comprehensive election victory, Gerry Murphy said he "looks forward to full engagement" with the new NI Secretary of State Hilary Benn, and his Minister of State Fleur Anderson, both of whom NIC-ICTU had worked with while in opposition.

We took forward these discussions we have already had on several occasions with the new Labour ministers shortly after the election on the key issues we highlighted before the polls.

These included a "new path for sustainable finances in Northern Ireland. While the UK government has finally begun to accept the scale of the problem of underfunding and long-term underinvestment, more is required to address the real needs of working families and their communities.

"There are other matters which impact on our devolved administration and can only be properly addressed through Westminster, such as scrapping the Legacy Act with the same alacrity as the announced scrapping of the Rwanda Safety Act. Both are insults to the good name of any democracy and international



With Minister of State Fleur Anderson
in August 2024

standards of human rights. Also, the rights of everybody here can be greatly improved if the government honour the commitment made by the last Labour government in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and take to legislative completion a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

"These are the first days of what could be a new progressive politics across the UK and inside the North. We represented the interests of our members under the hostile eyes of Tory NIO ministers who refused to seriously engage with this movement – and that is what led over the past winter to the most comprehensive series of strikes and industrial action ever seen here.

"We are keen to be constructive partners as well as critical friends with this Labour government and all parties elected to the NI Assembly. We have much to rebuild, and can do it better working together."



Meeting then shadow NI minister
Fleur Anderson in May 2024

E3 New Employment Bill

In July 2024, the Ministry for the Economy opened a public consultation with proposals to update and substantially improve workers rights in Northern Ireland. NIC-ICTU has been lobbying for such legislation since the Better Work Better Lives campaign and has been engaged in negotiations with political parties, government officials and other interested groups, such as members of the Labour Relations Agency's Stakeholder Forum.

Key for Minister Conor Murphy is what he calls his 'Good Jobs Agenda'. The four aspects of a Good Job, as defined by the Carnegie Framework are: terms of employment; pay and benefits; voice and representation; and promote a healthy work-life balance.

Below are what NIC-ICTU, after detailed work with employment law experts and practitioners across our movement, define as the key aspects of this new legislation:

- Promotion by NI Executive departments and statutory agencies of Collective bargaining whereby employees negotiate with their employer through union representatives to establish terms and conditions of employment, in workplace and across sectors.
- Access for workers to join trade unions and a right of access for a trade union representative to access a workplace. This includes a digital right of access which would give unions the right to reasonable electronic communication with workers.
- Simplification of the process of have a trade union official recognised to represent workers in a workplace, for example by removing the 21-minimum employee threshold, or electronic balloting.
- Protections for Trade Union Representatives.
- Statutory rights for trade union equalities representatives.
- Electronic ballots for union elections and industrial action.
- Measures which ensure that all workers have the right to take official industrial action free from the fear of dismissal or victimisation.
- A single employment status category of 'worker' with the same floor of employment rights and protections currently enjoyed by those designated as employees from day 1.
- A right to seek flexible working arrangements.
- Replacing zero-hours contracts by requiring employers to provide guaranteed contractual hours per week.
- All agency, temporary, and fixed term contract workers to have the right to permanent employment after one year.
- Clearer employment contracts and itemised payslips.
- Public Procurement to Improve Employment Models.
- Prevent an employer from sacking their workforce and either re-hiring them on inferior conditions or replacing them with another workforce.
- Greater protections of jobs and skills through, for example a strengthening of statutory consultation rights prior to redundancies.
- Better Enforcement of Employment Rights and Reform of Employment Tribunals
- A new Single Enforcement Body (SEB) to transform the fragmented labour enforcement system and prevent labour exploitation by providing end-to-end protection for workers.
- A Comprehensive Review of Work-Life Balance Measures
- Strengthened flexible leave entitlements as well as access to family leaves (maternity, paternity, parental, carers leave, bereavement leave/s)
- A Right to 'disconnect' - to not perform work outside agreed working hours.

More detail on 'Good Jobs' can be read in Section G



E4 Challenging Racism and the Far Right

ICTU and its affiliates have defended the rights of migrant workers and have opposed racism with the same commitment that we oppose sectarianism. We have hosted marches and rallies in defence of migrants and asylum seekers. We have for years delivered an education programme which provides training on racism and the far right. ICTU appointed in 2023 David Carroll as project leader against racism and the far-right following resolutions passed at the 2023 BDC in Kilkenny.

After the horrific murder of three children in Southport and attempts to kill others, there was a wave of unrelated racist violence triggered by misinformation on social media a disgraceful and cynical manipulation by politicians and international actors. A racist attack followed in Ballykelly and there were calls for street agitation aimed at mosques and minorities. ICTU immediately called for support for victims and the emergency services. NIC-ICTU chair Paddy Mackel said: *"We also stand with all vulnerable citizens of any background attacked or threatened by racist and Islamophobic thugs, such as the families targeted and threatened with racist graffiti in Ballykelly on Wednesday night. We urge all political parties and civic leaders to make clear their unapologetic opposition to all attacks of this nature, including the messengers of racism, islamophobia and sectarianism."*

ICTU President Justin McCamphill added:

"We endorse the assertion of our friends in the TUC's North-West region that 'Southport and our communities do not need to meet violence with further violence. Whipping up hate and fear is not acceptable. As trade unions in the region, we will continue to work with our members in workplaces across Southport and beyond, to provide practical support and solidarity and defeat the narrative of hate'.



Paddy Mackel addresses rally against racism, Stormont August 2024

"ICTU represents over 800,000 workers in trade unions across the island of Ireland. The playbook being spread around the UK this week is the same as the lies and fearmongering after a similar attack on children in Dublin last November. The message from trade unionists then is the same today – we stand with all victims of hate crime; we support our public servants who defend the vulnerable and we have zero tolerance for divisive misinformation or attempts to spark violence."

After a wave of violence and arson targeting muslim-owned businesses forced the NI Assembly to break its summer recess and debate the violence at Stormont, NIC-ICTU called for a public rally at the steps of Parliament Buildings for trades unionists and all those across our community who share our values of equality, diversity and solidarity. We worked with our friends at NICVA to ensure a large and representative turnout. Speakers included. NICVA Chief Executive Celine McStravick, Unison Regional Secretary Patricia McKeown with Unison member and NHS worker Susan Magutakuona, as well as NIC-ICTU chair Paddy Mackel who told those gathered:



Unison's Susan Magutakuona spoke powerfully at the rally



"It is clear that the protests and violence we have witnessed did not occur in a vacuum and that much of that agitation has its roots in decades of neglect and underfunding by successive UK governments, which has enabled mistrust and resentment to fester. Those concerns need to be addressed urgently and we in the Trade Union Movement will be at the forefront of demanding change.

"Equally however, it must be emphasised that ongoing racist attacks and violence that we have witnessed across many areas in the community are shameful and completely unjustifiable. The trade union movement stands together with all citizens who have been threatened or attacked, regardless of creed, class, colour of our skin, or race.



"We offer solidarity to all those who have borne the brunt of these disgraceful assaults. Shop keepers and retail workers. Health workers who traveled here from other countries, often at government's request to care for and comfort our citizens. Owners of cafes and restaurants who make an honest living by providing employment and serving the wider community. Asylum seekers fleeing persecution and war from elsewhere in the world, who are warehoused in hotels which are not designed for ongoing family living. Our under-resourced Emergency Services who have also faced abuse and violence for protecting lives, homes and small businesses.

"We welcome the recall of our elected NI Assembly. There are clear policy issues at the heart of many of the frustrations felt across the community which can and must be addressed. We have a locally accountable Assembly and Executive which we will lobby relentlessly and apply democratic pressure to ensure that everyone in the community feels secure and safe, our public services protected, and that politicians refocus their efforts to ensure that we create a better society, with good jobs, proper support for citizens, decent housing for all and safer streets."



Writing on the wall at Royal Victoria Hospital, early 2024

E5 Health Committee

The Health Committee continued to meet regularly online, with interventions in the media, and with the NI Assembly Health Committee. The structures of partnership between trade unions and management established under the Delivering Together strategy endorsed by the NI Executive alongside long-standing bargaining structures, ensured that the trade union voice on workers' concerns and ideas were heard as the health crisis evolved over the year.

Health unions were represented by NIC-ICTUs representative on both the Public Health Agency and the Department of Health's Improvement and Transformation Advisory Board (ITAB), which replaced the previous Transformation Advisory

Board (TAB) in 2022 (see further below). In addition, the myriad TIGs (Transformation Implementation Groups) had union representation reflective of the specialisation of each TIG.

Significant changes have been made to the bodies established with regards to the transformation programme across health. The Transformation Advisory Board (TAB) has been stood down and replaced by a new Improvement and Transformation Advisory Board (ITAB). The Management Board for Rebuilding HSC services created during the pandemic has been replaced by a new Performance and Transformation Executive Board. These new structures were established without consultation being undertaken with trade unions, which the Health Committee challenged as well as expressing concern at the Terms



of Reference for ITAB. The Committee is engaging with these structures in order to ensure that trade unions are represented, but continue to reserve our position regarding ongoing participation.

The Health Committee's Chair Anne Speed (Unison) and vice-Chair Claire Ronald (CSP) continued with the support of over 12 affiliated unions representing workers across the Health and Social Care sector.

In particular, affiliate unions representing physiotherapists, allied health professionals and radiographers were concerned about the lack of implementation of recommendations made within workforce reviews conducted within these areas. A lack of investment in training and recruitment of specialist staff was a major area of concern. Within midwifery, there were concerns there was no sense of what the optimum midwifery and maternity support workforce should be both now and in the future.

A review process was also underway in relation to the social work care workforce and had to be incorporated into the implementation of the post 2019 dispute framework agreement on safe staffing. Bargaining structures advised NIC-ICTU of their interventions on workforce vacancies and the burden of agency staffing costs.

These intensified as the cost of living crisis impacted on the already suppressed wages of workers at all levels of the NHS. Faced

with an intransigent Tory government and no NI Health minister of Assembly scrutiny committee to lobby and negotiate, health unions balloted members for industrial action, receiving large mandates for action short of strike action, and full strikes. Notably, these ballots were being passed in unions with little or no history of taking industrial action at all, let alone strikes.

There were several days of strike action involving several affiliates taking co-ordinated action, and there was a series of strike rallies at Belfast City Hall with feeder parades coming from the city's three main hospitals. These culminated in the Generalised Day of Action on 18 January 2024, which brought out almost the entire NHS workforce, aside from those workers whom it was agreed would provide emergency cover or stay on duty providing essential healthcare. And as noted elsewhere in this report, the pressure worked in achieving acceptable pay settlements and pledges of legislation on safe staffing.

A significant and longstanding concern for health unions pre Covid-19 was the impact of health inequality on our members, their families, their communities and the wider health and social care system. Significant and persistent inequalities exist between the most and least economically deprived areas, such as lower life expectancy,



John-Patrick Clayton (Unison)

increased suicide rates and higher preventable death rates. Health unions have highlighted the detrimental impact that such substantial health inequalities have on the operation of the HSC system in terms of significantly higher hospital admissions from the most deprived areas compared to the least deprived.

To address this situation, health unions believe we need a model of public health which requires not only radical reform of the health and social care system, but also a radical change in the way all Government Ministers and Departments take their share of responsibility for the health and well-being of all the people. Health outcomes are not just the responsibility of the Department of Health, HSC Trusts or the various arms-length bodies. A significant, cross-governmental approach is required to tackle health inequality. This is another reason why unions took every opportunity to call for the restoration of devolved powers to the NI Executive, the NI Assembly and especially its statutory committees.

An example of how the NI Assembly and its Health Committee benefitted the working lives of NHS staff was the successful passage of a Private Members Bill on car parking charges in hospital grounds. However, this legislation has been suspended by the NI Assembly as the health trusts have not made adequate preparations for its implementation in early 2024.

Another health issue raised with politicians by health unions was abortion services, both their availability to patients across all trusts, and the safety of staff and services users. Concerns were raised about interference at clinics in Belfast and Newry by local trade unionists and both Health and Womens' Committee worked together with Alliance for Choice and the NI Human Rights Committee to gather accurate information and advocate solutions which protects the rights of women to access legal health services, the rights of health

professionals to deliver a safe service and respects the right of free expression (without harassment) to people who object to abortion. The Health Committee supported the successful Private Members Bill on safe zones around health premises ensuring service users had safe access without intimidation.



Stormont July 2024

The Covid-19 Inquiry

ICTU is a core participant in the UK Covid Inquiry, alongside colleagues in the TUC, WTUC and STUC.

This has involved working with affiliates and our records of a substantial amount of records and data covering the period 2008-2022, as modules 1, 2 and 3 examined the UK's preparedness for a pandemic, how it handled the pandemic from February 2022-24, and how the National Health Service coped.

Thus far, NIC-ICTU has delivered detailed responses to requests for evidence under The Inquiries Act 2005, and on two occasions ICTU AGS Gerry Murphy made oral evidence.

Module 1 revealed how the UK's public health system had been ground down by a decade of austerity. What hindsight offers us now is the bigger picture, as detailed by ICTU's Gerry Murphy to the Covid inquiry:

"In the 10 years between 2010 and 2020, the grant for Resource DEL was £177m below what it was in 2009/10, a 1.6% reduction while public expenditure on health continued to increase by around 6% annually. By 2020, current spending pressures, including health, were estimated to be in the region of £500m per annum.

"There was a boost to capital spending in 2019/20 which brought the total spend to within £10m of the 2009/10 spend. However, capital spending fell back in cash terms in 2020/21 and was £137m or 9.2% below where it was in 2019/10 in real terms.

"The cumulative loss in capital spending in the 10 years to 2020 was £4.2bn. It was estimated in 2020 that the NI Executive has a backlog of capital expenditure projects totalling £5bn, and this is likely to have increased substantially in the years since."



Health Committee chair Anne Speed

The UK Covid Inquiry's Module 2c arrived in Belfast in April 2024, and heard evidence from politicians, senior civil servants, health officials and 'ordinary' people affected by the pandemic. According to NISRA's figures, over 4,000 people died of covid 19-related illness in NI between February 2020 and October 2021. About ten per cent were of working age. These were the people for whom Gerry Murphy gave evidence on the second day of the public hearings in Belfast.

Gerry Murphy noted that the highest proportion of the 391 deaths of people of working age was amongst process, plant, and machine operatives (12.91%), whereas professional and technical occupations had the lowest rates (4.5%).

A great many in front-line and essential work were in lower paid roles, who could not safely work from home, and were already suffering health disadvantages. That included many who worked in health and social care, but also those who kept transport moving, who cleaned public spaces, who worked in food processing and manufacturing. This was acknowledged by the Chief Medical Officer, Sir Michael McBride: *'With Covid-19 those at increased risk of infection included those at greater occupational risk in public facing roles; those who were unable to work from home; those from lower socioeconomic groups living in crowded or multiple-*



Gerry Murphy addresses the Covid 19 Enquiry

occupancy housing, who often in addition found it difficult to work from home or self-isolate for financial reasons’.

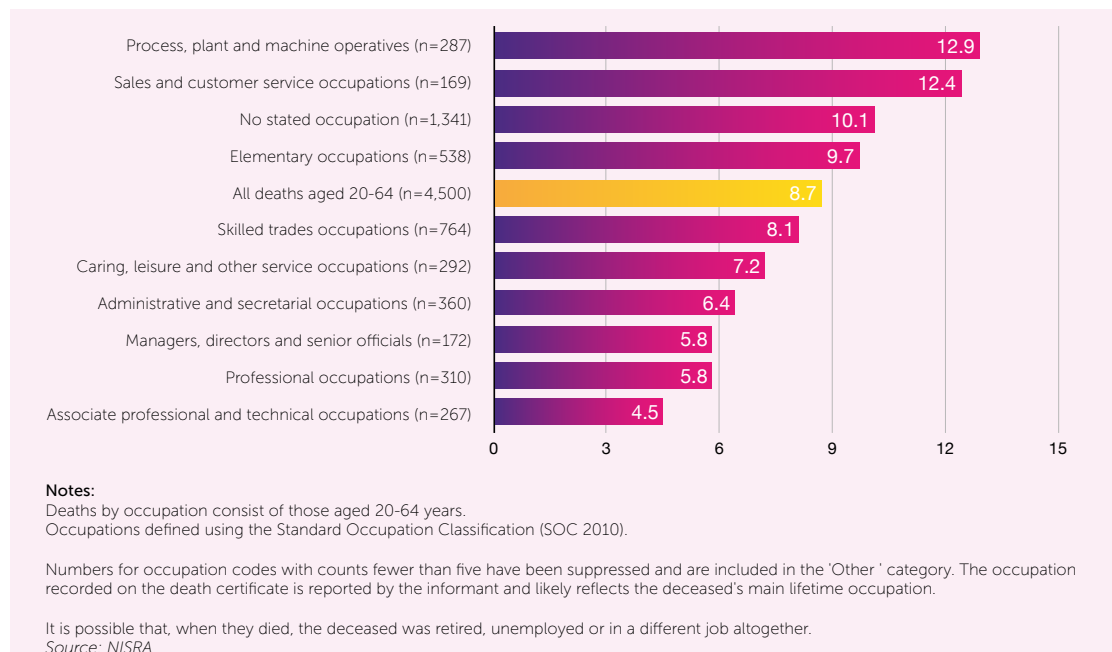
Those who had no choice but to continue to attend workplaces were at greater risk of catching the virus and passing it on to vulnerable relatives and into those communities already suffering health disadvantages.

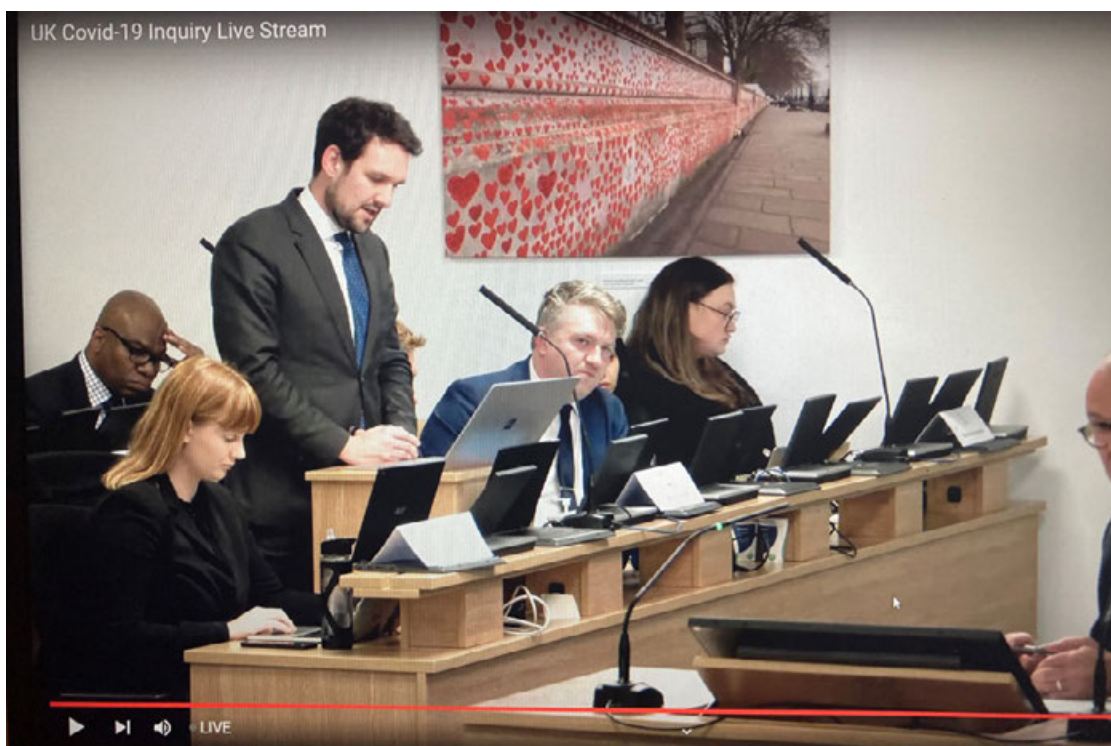
There is never a good time to have a pandemic, but there was a confluence of circumstances which made things incontrovertibly worse. The NI Executive

had just returned after a three year suspension, and the legacy of years of austerity politics had reduced.

Nor had the refusal of NIO ministers or the devolved NI Executive to engage with trade unions on anything like the level seen in the devolved administrations in Cardiff and Edinburgh. *“For instance in Health, the Bengoa Report which was delivered in late 2016 set out the context for the transformation of health services that was required to put the services on a sustainable footing given demographic and other pressures,”* Mr Murphy said. *“The report noted that additional funding would be required to transition services to this new approach. The report recommended a ring-fenced transformation fund. The collapse of the Executive meant that none of this work was undertaken before the pandemic took hold in 2020.”*

Richard Pengelly, then Permanent Secretary of the Department of Health, stated: *“The problems that were experienced during the pandemic involved the increase in the number of patients already waiting for elective procedures due to the need to divert service delivery from routine primary care and*





Barrister Sam Jacobs represented TUC/ICTU at the Covid Inquiry

elective care in order to provide the services required to treat Covid-19 patients. This problem had its roots in the combination of under-investment in elective care and reform to clear the backlog before the pandemic."

Notwithstanding the constructive engagement of individual ministers in departments such as Health and Education, this was not sufficient in the context of the Covid-19 crisis. The Covid-19 pandemic impacted on all aspects of government; piecemeal social partnership was not sufficient to address the all-encompassing nature of the crisis.

The primary mechanism through which the Executive sought to engage with representative bodies during the pandemic was through the Strategic Engagement Forum, formed at the outset of the pandemic which brought together employers, trade unions and statutory bodies including the PHA and HSENI. After a good start mitigating the initial impact of Covid on workplaces and keeping essential commercial and public

services going, Mr Murphy added that "the Forum was unfortunately largely ignored by the Executive."

"The strength of consistent and embedded social partnership is demonstrated by the tripartite arrangement which exists between the Fire Brigades Union, employers, and Chief Fire Officers, which involved considered consultation and co-working from all three sides. It is notable that not a single fire fighter died of Covid-19.

"We all need mechanisms for meaningful social engagement advance of any crisis. It is not enough for individual ministers to meet with stakeholders. It is not enough for government to put in place mechanisms to receive the views of representative bodies such as unions. Social partnership must be a part of the culture of government and the way in which it carries out business – embedded in advance – if the steps taken to respond to a crisis are to be effective on the ground."

The inquiry continues.

E6 Education Trade Union Group

The ETUG is made up of teaching and support staff unions organising in the education sectors, chaired since 2022 by Alan Law (NIPSA) and Marie O'Shea (INTO). It meets regularly to develop education policy matters for the NI trade union movement, and was extremely busy during the pandemic as the schools became contentious sites over the public health discussion. It lobbies policy makers, as well as the public and was a useful hub of information across 12 unions, both in outlining the effects of budget cuts and co-ordinating support for unions taking industrial action. Both teaching and support staff took several days of strike action as well as months of action short of strike in separate disputes.

Sadly, the withdrawal of DUP ministers from the NI Executive at the start of 2022 truncated the pro-active engagement between the ETUG and MLAs in Stormont. ETUG members briefed some political parties on policy priorities despite the effective suspension of the NI Assembly, which meant there was a suite of education issues ready for the attention of Stormont when it was revived in early 2024, with a new education minister, Paul Givan from the DUP.

There was legislation from the previous mandate on reforming FETO, the regulations exempting schools from many important parts of equality legislation. ETUG had also lobbied in support of a Private Members Bill promoting integrated education, reiterating the long-held support for an education system which is secular and pluralist.

ETUG and its members also lobbied for safer and more tolerant school environments for students and staff, by supporting a comprehensive Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum which addresses the needs of this society and empowers our young people to make informed choices and effect change in their own lives. Related to that was a robust campaign against sexual



abuse and harassment in schools and staff being trained and equipped to deal with its manifestations, including on social media.

But the main item for ETUG was support for members in dispute over pay, as well as grading for support staff. Threats to education budgets were constant. For instance, in February 2023, ETUG welcomed the refusal of the board of the employing body to support severe cuts. *"We welcome the Education Authority Board refusing to back the draft savings plan". However, "we are concerned that a letter that has been sent to schools today does pass on the need for savings to be made by them, and also about the direction given in the letter 'to defer entering into any new contractual arrangements for staff or services'."*

The out workings of this means that our lowest paid staff, such as those providing classroom assistance support to our most needy children, will not get job security and may therefore not be appointed. We cannot expect our most vulnerable children with Special Needs to be deprived as a result of a political choice. The hard-won gains we have made in this area cannot be lost.

"Our children are often trying to learn in environments that are less than conducive to learning, as they are already run down and in need of maintenance which has not be budgeted for in several years.

"The members of the Education Trade Union Group have a duty to speak out for our members and the students they serve in our schools. We will continue to campaign for our pupils to be taught to the highest of standards with adequate and appropriate resources and safe buildings."

Suspension of the NI Executive meant that devolved government departments were prevented from using monitoring rounds to redistribute funding from other sections of the state to the Department of Education and the Education Authority. The Education Authority (EA) was provided with an indicative budget allocation by the Department of Education (DE) on 30 March 2023. This position was confirmed in a final allocation letter on 1 June. By October, the EA was forecasting a £201m funding deficit in 2023/24. Despite claims of profligate spending by Stormont departments, these shortfalls are the result of external inflationary pressures such as hikes in energy costs.

In these circumstances, widespread strikes happened, involving every union with members in the sector, including affiliates who had never before taken strike action, the NAHT. ETUG is separate from bargaining structures, but acted as a support and information hub for affiliates during these historic disputes. The pressure worked, and with the restoration of the NI Executive with the financial resources and political will to justly resolve the disputes, by the summer of 2024 all of these had been settled to the satisfaction of thousands of members.

The ETUG were also invited to brief the NI Assembly Education Committee after restoration. This allowed discussion on issues such as those mentioned above, our opposition to academic selection at 11, and other initiatives such as Free School Meals for every child, a UK-wide campaign led by Unison, and a long-standing ICTU policy.

At the time of going to press, ETUG was engaged in challenging the Education

Minister Paul Givan on his proposals for a new management authority to support the controlled schools' sector. The concerns raised by ETUG include:

- There was no prior notification of the staff unions within the Education Authority
- The Minister's description of the Education Authority as failing controlled schools without providing any context or taking account of years of underfunding
- The failure of the Chief Executive of the EA to defend the organisation
- The review will be led by the Chief Executive of the Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC). As currently constituted the CSSC has three places for the Transferor Representatives' Council. ETUG are concerned that the direction of travel is to convert the existing body to a management authority. There are many teachers and support staff within EA (controlled integrated and special school staff in particular) who are not currently within a school with a specific religious ethos.

The ETUG do not believe that this review is warranted but nevertheless are seeking commitments that

- a) All recognised unions will be consulted with during the review
- b) If a new body is constituted that the board will have a balance of members which reflects the full diversity of Northern Ireland including trade union representatives.

The ETUG recognises that there is an argument that this is justified as maintained schools have a separate managing authority but believe that creating a new body is a retrograde step and that the Minister should focus instead on delivering a single managing authority for all teachers and support staff.

E7 Council of the Isles/ North-South Committee

The council of the isles is the annual meeting of the trade union centres across these islands. The body comprises of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) of England, the Scottish TUC, the Wales TUC and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

The council of the isles meeting in 2023 took place on the 24th and 25th October in Belfast. The representatives of ICTU were Owen Reidy GS, Gerry Murphy AGS and Justin McCamphill, ICTU President

Issues discussed and debated included trade unions strategies dealing with the cost of living crisis, trade union renewal and reform, digital campaigning and collective bargaining.



Roz Foyer (STUC), at
Council of the Isles meeting



Paul Nowak (TUC and Shavannah Taj (WTUC)

The ICTU North-South Committee has been revived, its terms of reference updated and met in September 2024. Its members are:

- Owen Reidy, ICTU
- Gerry Murphy, ICTU
- Gerry McCormack, ICTU
- Anne Speed, UNISON
- Carmel Gates, NIPSA
- Denise Walker, GMB
- Frank Jones, IFUT
- John Boyle, INTO
- John O'Connell, FSU
- JP Clayton, UNISON
- Justin McCamphill, NASUWT
- Katie Morgan, FORSA
- Kevin Callinan, FORSA
- Paddy Mackel, UCU
- Patricia McKeown, UNISON
- Phil Ni Sheaghdha, INMO
- Susan Fitzgerald UNITE
- Taryn Trainor, UNITE

E8 Private Sector Committee

The NIC-ICTU re-established the Private Sector Committee (PSC) in February 2024 to promote, develop and protect the interests of private sector workers, including the maintenance and protection of terms and conditions of employment. The PSC will assist the NIC-ICTU by responding to all issues pertaining to the private sector.

The PSC is working with NERI on mapping the NI private sector to identify opportunities for unions to organise and to better understand issues affecting workers within the sector.

While the findings of the mapping exercise will to a large extent guide the work of the PSC, other issues that this new committee may work on include:

1. Exploring additional issues for the collective bargaining agenda, including:
 - Women's health, safety and well-being at work, including menopause and period dignity.
 - Gender pay gap.
 - Skills development.
 - Climate change/net zero greenhouse gas emissions target/just transition, and the need for training and recognition of 'Green Reps.'
 - Recognition of 'Equality Reps.'
2. Lobbying for legislative change on issues including union recognition and greater protections from redundancies and plant closures.
3. Strategies and materials to organise BME and migrant workers.
4. Bespoke training for private sector union reps and officials.
5. Better promotion of union successes in the sector and the sharing of relevant information, including organising strategies.

The Chair of the PSC is Alan Perry, GMB, and the Committee is open to representatives of all affiliates with membership in the private sector.

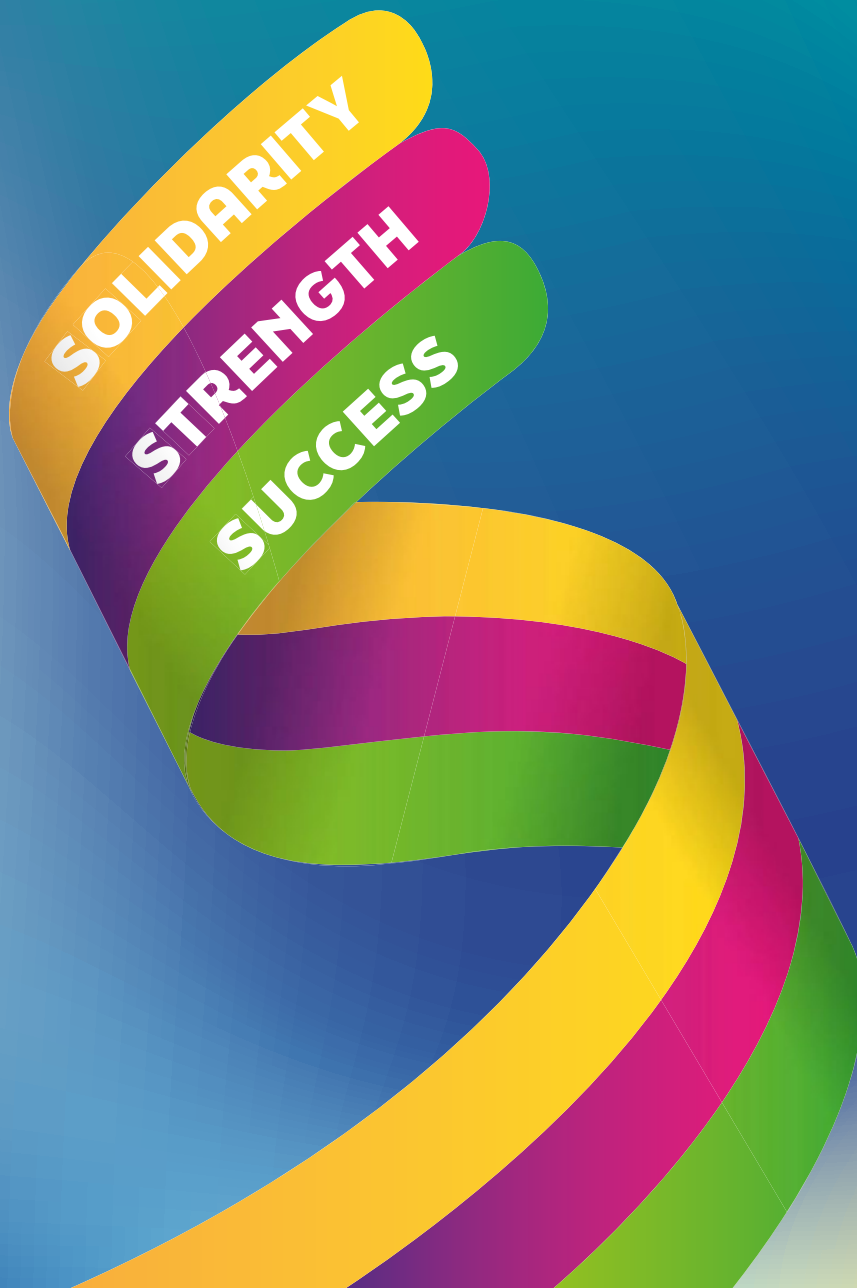


Alan Perry GMB



Section F

EQUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS



BDC24

Equality and Human Rights

F1 Introduction

The following is a report on the work of Congress and the Equality Committees in pursuit of our objectives for a fairer and more equal society.

EQUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS SUB-GROUP (EHRSG)

The Equality and Human Rights Sub Group continues to meet with members of the NIC, Equality Officers from affiliated unions together with Chairs of NIC-ICTU Equality Committees.

During the period, the EHRSG engaged with the Dedicated Mechanism Unit (DMU) of the Northern Ireland Human Rights and Equality Commissions.

Senior Officials of the DMU attended meetings of the Northern Ireland Committee to give briefings on their work including in relation to Article 2 of the Northern Ireland Protocol. In March 2024, the Commissions published their advice in

relation to the applicability of the EU Pay Transparency Directive to Northern Ireland.

The paper sets out the two Commissions' analysis that the new EU Pay Transparency Directive amends Directive 2006/54/EC, on the **Equal Treatment of Women and Men in employment and occupation**, which is included in Annex 1 of the Windsor Framework. Amendment or replacement of the Annex 1 Directives triggers the dynamic alignment obligation under Article 13(3) of the Windsor Framework, requiring the law in NI to keep pace.



M Murphy Higgins, WC Chairperson addresses WC



T Trainor, UNITE addresses Women's Seminar 2023



NIPSA delegates at conference

25 Anniversary of the Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement (B/GFA)

2023 marked the 25th Anniversary of the signing of the B/GFA.

To mark this anniversary, Congress organised a seminar in December 2023. The Seminar brought together a range of speakers from the trade union movement, political parties and from Government and the UK Opposition.

The ICTU President opened the seminar and UNISON's Patricia McKeown Chaired the first session which featured a representative from all the main political parties in Northern Ireland. Speaking were Jonathan Buckley (DUP), Declan Kearney (SF), Matthew O'Toole (SDLP), Tom Elliot (UUP) and Eoin Tennyson (APNI).

Shadow
Secretary
of State for NI,
Hilary Benn
GFA Dec 23



J Buckley DUP, GFA event

Political panel discussion GFA
event Dec 23





Addressing strand 2 of the B/GFA, was the Minister for Education Ms Norma Foley TD with then Shadow Secretary of State Mr Hilary Benn, MP representing the UK Government.

Daniel Holder, Director of the Committee for the Administration of Justice represented civil society and the event heard from senior trade union leaders from across the island on the importance of the B/GFA – and most particularly the full implementation of same, including a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. NIC-ICTU Chairperson Paddy Mackel Chaired this session with Ronan Sharkey from the ICTU Youth Committee giving the perspective of young workers.

Assistant General Secretary Gerry Murphy closed the event.



R Sharkey, Youth Committee Chair



Senior Trade Union Leaders address the event, chaired by P Mackel



D Holder, CAJ addresses the seminar



Declan Kearney Sinn Fein



Gerry Murphy, AGS, ICTU closes the GFA seminar

F2 Women's Committee

Women's Committee in Northern Ireland.

The Officers during the period were

Maxine Murphy Higgins
NASUWT, Chairperson

Tina Creaney
NIPSA, Vice Chair

Eileen Gorman
FSU, Secretary.

Pamela Dooley, RIP

Pamela was a 'fixture' at all women's conference and seminars, frequently speaking to motions with great passion and experience as well as chairing conference and many fringe sessions.

Pamela was an advocate and role model for women in the trade union movement and encouraged many other women to become active in their union always sharing generously her great experience. Pamela will be greatly missed by her sisters on the Women's Committee and by the women of the trade union movement. Our condolences to her daughter Caroline, wider family and to her family within UNISON Northern Ireland.



Former Chair of the NIC-ICTU and Women's Committee P Dooley, UNISON together with T Moriarty and P McKeown

The Women's Committee heard with great sadness and regret of the death of Pamela Dooley in 2023. Pamela was a former Chair of the ICTU Women's Committee and a long standing member, she also served as NIC-ICTU Chair and championed the work of the Women's Committee at the Northern Ireland Committee.



O Reidy, General Secretary ICTU addresses Women's Conference 2024



Long standing member of the WC and long time Secretary to the committee, E Gorman, FSU



Women's Committee Work included:

The Women's Committee worked together to organise the National Women's Conference in 2024 in Athlone, the theme was *Valuing Care in all it's forms* - a prerequisite for a sustainable economy. Writing in the report to conference ICTU General Secretary Owen Reidy said

From childcare to caring for our elderly citizens and most vulnerable adults, care in all it's forms is the building block for the labour market, for a sustainable economy and most importantly for a decent society. Regrettably, it remains the fact that the burden of care rests with women and despite recent historic victories by trade unions in the care sector, caring as a profession is undervalued, underpaid and often overlooked by governments as a major sector in sustainable jobs as well as an priority economic infrastructure. As General Secretary, I wish to thank the Women's Committee for choosing to focus on Care in all it's forms at this conference.

Without a proper caring infrastructure, including accessible and affordable childcare as well as a quality social care infrastructure and a valued and well paid caring workforce, it is impossible to achieve the trade union aspiration of decent and sustainable work for everyone who wants it and a safe and secure society. As Congress General Secretary, I will ensure that the deliberations and recommendations from this conference are considered as priority work for the Congress Executive Council.



Palestinian ambassador to Ireland addressed the WC in 2024



H Crickard, UNISON addresses women's conference



A Speed, UNISON addressing conference

The Conference was honoured to receive the Palestinian Ambassador to Ireland Dr Jilan Wahba Abdalmajid. The Ambassador gave a moving speech highlighting the plight of women and children in Palestine and thanked the trade union movement for their support and solidarity. The Ambassador received a standing ovation of several minutes.



Standing ovation for the Palestinian Ambassador to Ireland



The Women's Committee also organised a Women's Seminar in the Fairways Hotel in March 2023. *'Demanding a Fair Deal for Women Workers'* included fringe meetings on Afghanistan, Iran and Palestine as well as guest speakers on topics such as the gender pay gap and gender and climate change.

Women's Council of the Isles

The 2022 Women's Council of the Isles (WCol) took place in Glasgow and was hosted by the STUC Women's Committee. The overarching theme was tackling sexual harassment and members of the Women's Committee gave updates on developments in each jurisdiction.

The 2023 WCol took place in Llandudno, Wales hosted by the Wales TUC Women's Committee. Presentations included the Stop the Stigma campaign and women in leadership as well as updates on developments in relation to sexual harassment. Of particular interest was a presentation from participants from the WTUC Black Activist programme as well as Guest Speaker Hannah Blythyn, Deputy Minister for Social Partnership.

Due to difficulty securing dates, the 2024 WCol will take place in early 2025 and will be held in Derry.

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

Statements were issued to mark International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November which highlighted the action being taken by trade unions in pursuing workplaces and society free from gender based violence.

ETUC Women's Committee

Congress is represented on the ETUC Women's Committee by the NI Equality Officer and the Committee met a number of times during this period.



J White at WCol 2023



The ETUC Women's Committee led on work including lobbying on the proposed new EU Directive on Gender Based Violence as robust as possible.

While welcoming the adoption of the Directive in May 2024, the ETUC Women's Committee voiced frustration that it failed to adequately deal with gender based violence in the world of work, despite repeated interventions by ETUC and Confederations.



Jill Weir addresses Women's Conference 2024

Also disappointing was the decision imposed by France and Germany to exclude Article 5 on the harmonised definition of rape based on consent in line with the standards of the Istanbul Convention.

In June 2024, the Executive Committee of the ETUC adopted a special resolution: On the Offensive to combat gender based violence in the world of work.

The resolution notes

- Preventing and combatting gender-based violence in the world of work is a key priority of the ETUC. The recently adopted *Directive combatting violence against women and domestic violence* fails to deliver meaningful provisions to make the world of work safer for women workers. It also fails to recognise our role as trade unions to end gender-based violence.
- Call for a new EU Directive eradicating gender-based violence in the world of work.
- A Directive to eradicate gender-based violence in the world of work should be included in the work programme of the upcoming European Commission and European Parliament on the basis of the social policy chapter of the TFEU. Occupational safety and health legislation is an important entry point for such an initiative.
- A proposal for a new Directive must include measures to prevent and tackle all relevant forms of gender-based violence in the world of work, online and offline, and offer practical solutions for safe workplaces through an intersectional lens, in which the social partners must be involved and trade unions have a key role. A strong focus should be made on how to define and address different aspects of economic violence, as well as the prevention of secondary victimisation and further discrimination. ETUC should seek support for such



WUC Vice Chair Tina Creaney, NIPSA with G Mathews, PCS

a call from the European Parliament, by means in particular, of monitoring the implementation of the *Directive combatting violence against women and domestic violence*, stressing the need for follow-up measures relating to the world of work.

The ETUC Women's Committee completed a new project on tackling gender based violence and harassment focusing particularly on new forms of violence including cyber bullying and harassment via social media. Congress was represented on the steering group and participated in interviews to contribute to the report and toolkit.

Priorities for the ETUC Women's Committee in 2024 Include:

- Monitor and influence the transposition of the Pay Transparency Directive, monitor the Gender Pension Gap
- Push for ETUC key demands to be included in the Directive combating violence against women and domestic violence
- Deliver concrete tools to end the undervaluation of work predominantly done by women and the gendered labour market segregation through



M Caddell, RCM

collective bargaining, social dialogue and legislation

- Launch a mapping of AI in the workplace and in training with the Women's Committee in preparation of the announced new Directive on AI in the workplace, influence the trialogues of the AI Act towards including a gender-dimension
- Adopt the Youth Action Plan at the Women's Committee meeting), and organise exchanges between the Women's Committee Presidium and the Youth Committee bureau.

Other work of the ICTU Committee

The Committee, through members and their unions, has continued to provide support to many campaigns including abortion provision, tackling period poverty, addressing issues of domestic abuse in the workplace and supporting positive action around a range of workplace issues including the menopause.



M O'Shea, INTO and WC member addresses conference.



UNISON delegates to conference



Pioneering Women honoured in Belfast City Hall

In June 2024, the Women's Committee was hosted by Belfast Lord Mayor, Micky Murray in his parlour. The discussion with the Lord Mayor included a contribution by the artists who had made the sculptures of Mary Ann McCracken and Winnifred Carney. Following the reception, the Committee visited the statues alongside the Lord Mayor and Council Officers.



Women's Committee with Lord Mayor at statue of Mary Ann McCracken

Women's Committee with Lord Mayor at statue of Winnifred Carney



Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Act

No one should lose their job or pay because of domestic abuse. In the previous Assembly mandate, former Green Party MLA Rachel Woods introduced a Private Members Bill to introduce paid domestic abuse leave. Congress fully engaged with Rachel and her team throughout the drafting of the Bill and we welcomed the final format as it was introduced to the NI Assembly.

The PMB was debated on the last sitting day of the Assembly and was carried, Royal Assent was also granted.

The Department for the Economy issued a consultation on the draft regulations in July 2024 and Congress submitted a response with input from the Women's Committee.

The Act entitles victims of domestic abuse to no less than 10 days' paid leave in each leave year for the purposes of dealing with issues related to domestic abuse. Issues relating to domestic abuse are noted as including:

- Obtaining legal advice, or pursuing legal proceedings.
- Finding alternative accommodation.
- Accessing healthcare.
- Obtaining welfare support.
- Protecting family members.

Northern Ireland Strategic Equality Strategies

The New Decade New Approach agreement promised the publication of long awaited social inclusion equality strategies. In late 2020, the Department for Communities invited NIC-ICTU to nominate onto co design groups for the Gender Equality, Disability and Anti-Poverty Strategies. Nominations were Clare Moore (ICTU), Taryn Trainor, (UNITE) and John Patrick Clayton, (UNISON). Co design groups were also established to deliver a Sexual Orientation Strategy.

The Co design groups working on each of the strategies committed significant time and energy to preparing robust documents to guide the development of the draft strategies. Despite this work, the Minister for Communities has yet to confirm when the draft strategies will be issued for consultation.

Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Sexual harassment in the workplace or associated with work continues to be a significant issue for many workers, predominantly affecting women. As part of ongoing joint work, Congress has worked with the LRA to publish guidance on preventing sexual harassment.

The Guidance is endorsed by Women in Business and was launched by the Minister for the Economy Conor Murphy in March 2024 as part of International Women's Day.





Minister for the Economy Conor Murphy MLA launches new Guidance with ICTU, LRA and Women in Business

Up-skirting and Down-blousing now recognised as criminal offences

Women's Committee member Maxine Murphy Higgins (NASUWT) represented the Committee in a Women's Policy group Evidence session to the Justice Committee during the scrutiny phase of the Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill.

NASUWT members were the subject of these horrific sexual offences and NASUWT has been to the forefront of campaigning to have the so called up-skirting and down-blousing recognised as crimes. The result of prolonged lobbying by unions and the women's sector resulted in this insidious practice being made criminal offences late 2023 when the Bill received Royal Assent.

Violence Against Women and Girls strategy

Following the high profile murders of women including Sarah Everard and Ashling Murphy, The Executive Office



S Rees, NASUWT and ICTU Women's Committee addresses conference

announced the development of an Ending Violence against Women and Girls strategy, something which the trade union movement has been calling for over many years.

Congress responded to the VAWG call for views and was represented on the Co Design group which met a number of times in late – end of 2022.

The Women's Committee, together with Congress Secretariat has met with Officials from TEO to highlight the need to include the workplace in the eventual strategy (including the realisation of ILO C190) and to press for legislative reform where necessary.

Congress was pleased to note that the draft framework and action plan, which was consulted on in 2023, included among the priority actions, the establishment of a workplace working group to include trade unions and employers. We look forward to playing a full role in this group and to bringing forward the many progressive policies which trade unions have championed in this area.

In their inaugural speeches to the Assembly, both the First Minister, Michelle O'Neil and Deputy First Minister, Emma Little Pengelly, mentioned their commitment to this strategy and area of work. ICTU looks forward to contributing to the Action Plan.



Tackling Rape Culture and the Bystander Approach

The NASUWT and the Women's Committee jointly organised a special screening of a film featuring educationalist and campaigner Jackson Katz.

The Bystander Moment: Tackling Rape Culture at its Roots tells the story of the innovative bystander approach developed

by pioneering activist and writer Jackson Katz and his colleagues. In analysis illustrated with archival footage and clips from news, sports, and entertainment media, Katz explores the role of bystanders -- especially friends, teammates, classmates, and co-workers—in perpetuating sexual harassment, sexual assault, and other forms of gender violence. Katz also gives special attention to the peer culture dynamics -- in particular the male peer culture dynamics across race and ethnicity -- that help to normalize sexism and misogyny while silencing other men in the face of abuse.

The screening took place at the MAC in Belfast and was introduced by NASUWT President and Women's Committee member Sally Rees together with Women's Committee Chair Maxine Murphy Higgins and was followed by a panel discussion with the audience chaired by NIC-ICTU Chair Paddy Mackel with Elaine Crory, WRDA and Jane McCarthy, The Executive Office.



P Mackel, Elaine Crory (WRDA) and Jane McCarthy (TEO) at the screening of the Bystander Film

Domestic and Sexual Violence Strategy

Congress is represented on the current advisory group to the Domestic and Sexual Violence strategy and responded to the call for views on the new strategy.

Members of the Congress Women's Committee and the Congress Secretariat play an active role on a number of coalition groups including the Equality Coalition, the Human Rights Consortium and the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform.

Industrial Action and campaigns

Members of the Women's Committee have been involved in notable industrial disputes during the period including the fight, led by UNITE, to keep the Regina Coeli women's hostel in Belfast open.

Other affiliated unions also took part in industrial action and campaigns during the period covered by the report and members of the Women's Committee have been active in these actions.

F3 Disability Committee

Disability Committee

Officers were

Chair **Lucia Collins**, NIPSA
Vice Chair **Pete Brennan**, SIPTU

Secretary **Pauline Hurst**, UTU

The Disability Committee organised a well attended seminar on mental health focusing on the HSENI's *Stress Management Standards* as well as the Equality law issues for trade union representatives.

The Committee held regular meetings which included guest speakers from Disability Action as well as the National Union for Supported Employment. Members of the

Committee and Secretariat contributed to strategic engagement on the Department for Communities Disability Employment Strategy and members of the Committee North and South attended the Harkin International Summit which was held in Belfast for the first time.

The Committee is working on a guide for trade unions on Neurodiversity in the workplace and this will be showcased at an event in Autumn 2024.

F4 LGBT

Following on from engagement with Belfast Pride, ICTU organised a coordinated presence of trade unions at Belfast pride in 2022. It was agreed that this was extremely successful and gave significant profile to trade unions at the largest parade in Northern Ireland. The Secretariat also had engagement with Pride Committees in Foyle and Omagh. It is hoped that this can be developed for 2023 to include a coordinated programme of events.

Consultation responses during this period included:

- Amendment of the Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay Regulations to include Miscarriage Leave and Pay Entitlement
- Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) consultation
- Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
- Response to the Executive Office call for views on an Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions response to consultation Period Products (free provision) Act (NI) 2022
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions Northern Ireland Committee response to the department of education consultation on relationship and sexuality education.

F5 Migrant Workers

Belfast City of Sanctuary

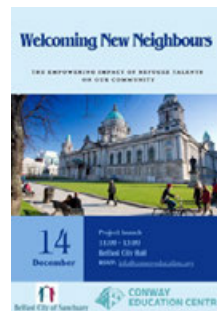
We are represented on the Belfast City Council Migrant Forum, and the Migrant Centre NI. Belfast City Council Migrant Forum supports networking and communication between organisations that work with minority ethnic communities.

MCNI was established to protect the rights of migrant workers in NI, tackle racism, eliminate barriers against migrant workers, advance education and raise public awareness about their rights.

NIC-ICTU's work with Migrant Workers is well established and has enriched our movement as much as we hope to have made easier the lives of people who come here to work or study. One project which started in the aftermath of the Syrian war was supporting asylum seekers and refugees, and now supports people and families seeking refuge from violence, persecution or discrimination.

Congress is represented on the Committee of Belfast City of Sanctuary, which is made up of refugees and asylum seekers and people new to Belfast in addition to those who are native to Belfast. It aims and objectives are:

to make Belfast a welcoming environment for refugees, asylum-seekers and new communities. Wherever refugees go in our neighbourhoods we want them to feel safe and to find people who welcome them, support them, include them in their activities, recognise and celebrate what they can contribute.

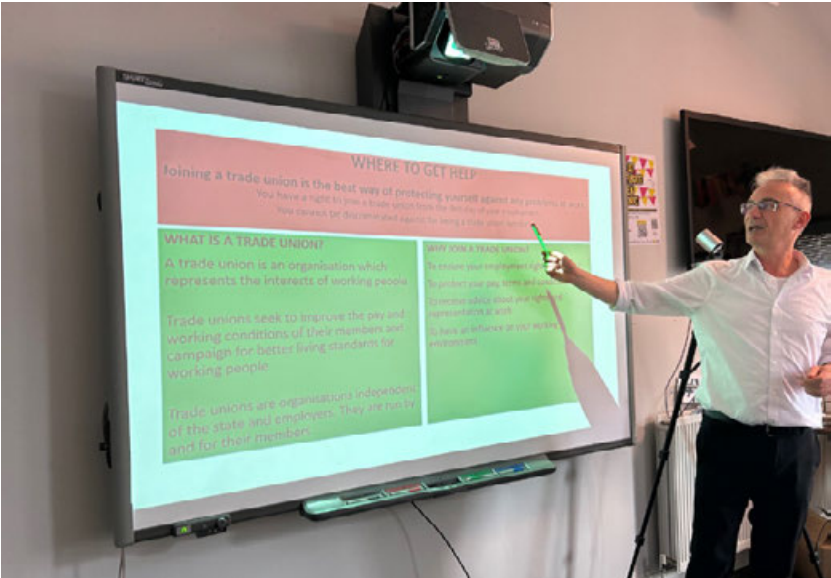




We want to build that same culture of welcome in our schools, workplaces, entertainment centres, places of worship and all public spaces. We hope to work with all those in public services, both at policy level and on the frontline, to ensure that an ethos of civility and welcome pervades at all times.

Congress works providing classes in workers' rights for refugees new to the labour market, including information for asylum seekers who cannot legally work before being granted 'status' by the Home Office. We also campaign for better detention facilities.

Affiliates NIPSA, FBU, Unison, Unite and NASUWT have contributed funding for the annual Refugee Picnic, and celebration of food and culture which entertained over 1200 asylum seeking and refugee families, held in south Belfast each summer.



Workers rights training for refugees and migrant workers



Belfast City of Sanctuary co-ordinator
Israel Eguoagie





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Equality & Human Rights



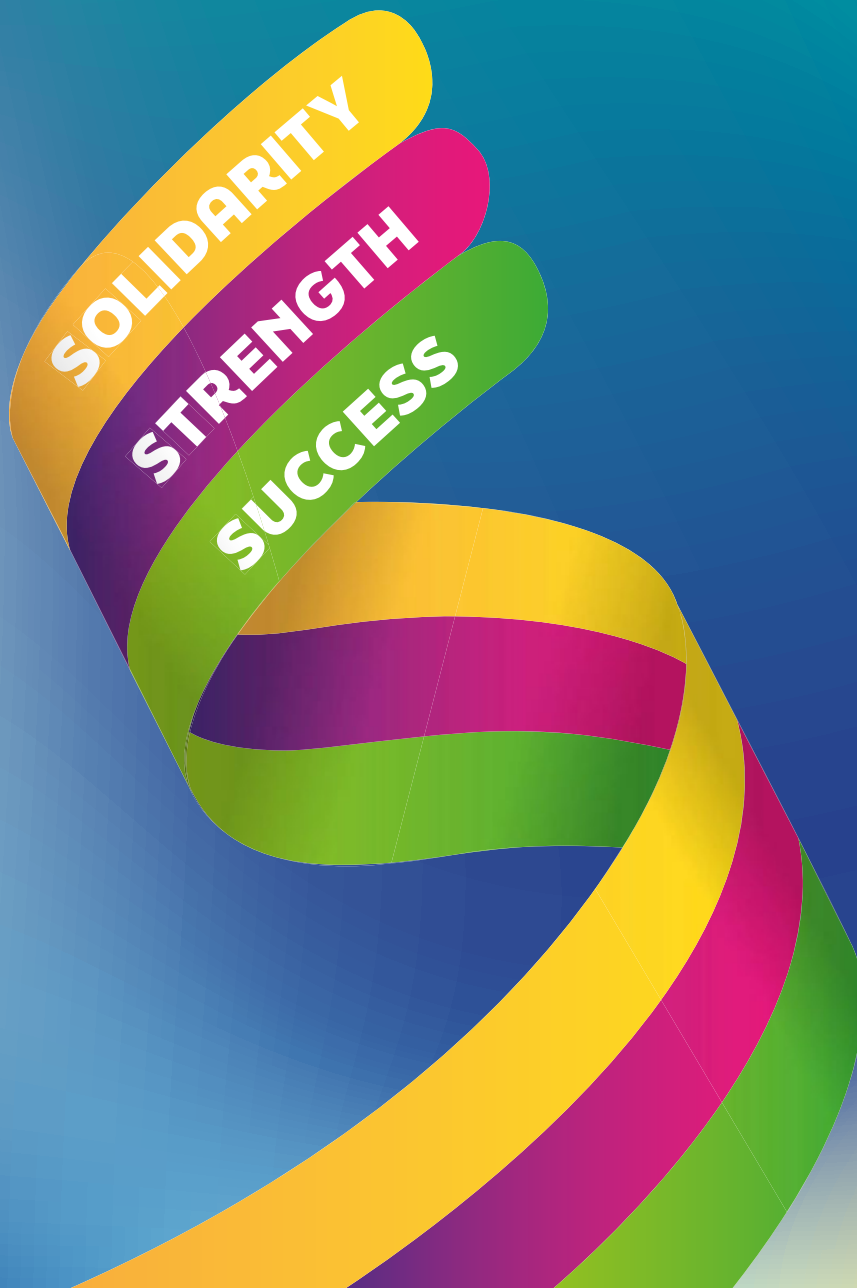
Belfast Deputy Mayor Aine Groogan at the Refugee picnic in 2024





Section G

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS



BDC24

G Industrial Relations

G1 LRA Engagement Forum

The Northern Ireland Engagement forum was set up as a result of a campaign by NIC-ICTU to achieve a forum for social dialogue in Northern Ireland and in response to the Covid 19 pandemic. The forum was to advise the Minister for the Economy and the Executive on labour market related matters relating to Covid 19. It had equal representation of union nominees and employer nominees.

After some initial good work on developing an essential workers list and a health and safety guide re Covid 19 in the workplace, it became clear that the Minister and parts of the Executive felt the work of the forum was over. The forum continued to meet into late 2021 and early 2022 having engagement with the Head of the NICS and the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Economy. With the collapse of devolution, the forum was mothballed.

However, in late 2023, following discussions the Labour Relations Agency proposed the creation of a new forum, born out of the merger of the Employment Relations Forum and Engagement Forum on Covid 19, "keen that membership comprises senior level people from business representative organisations and trade unions."

Five trade union leaders were nominated, Gerry Murphy, Carmel Gates, Denise Walker, Susan Fitzgerald and Patricia McKeown and meetings commenced in early 2024. Details of its programme and scope are still being negotiated, but its broadly accepted purpose is "to provide the strategic voice of employers and employees to government on employment-related legislation and policy matters affecting

the economic success and wellbeing of Northern Ireland workplaces."

Also "to provide a forum for broader social dialogue amongst employers, the representatives of employees/workers and government on key matters such as, employment-related policy matters, economic success and the well-being of employees across all workplaces."

Its meetings have included discussions on NI Executive economic policy and in particular, the 'Good Jobs' Employment Bill.

G2 Better in a Trade Union

**BETTER IN A
TRADE UNION**



In late 2023, The ICTU Executive agreed to support a programme aimed at increasing the visibility of trade union among younger workers. And so the island's jurisdictions shared a joint campaign entitled 'Better in a Trade Union' which was launched around May Day to promote the values and benefits of trade union membership and the power of collective action.

Trade Union Week activities took place in workplaces and local communities between Monday, 29th April and Friday, 3rd May, including information stalls and social events, activities in schools, colleges and universities, and public talks, table quizzes and film screenings. Justin McCamphill, current president of ICTU, said:



"The Better in a Trade Union campaign represents all 31 affiliated trade unions in Northern Ireland and by extension, just over 200,000 members. We have seen a great show of strength and solidarity over the recent months of strike action and this campaign, and Trade Union Week at the culmination of it, is a real celebration of the mass mobilisation we've seen by members across towns and cities here."

"We welcome the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive and look forward to the positive discussions at department level that will secure the long overdue improvements to pay and conditions for workers. We can celebrate the huge impact that our members' strike action had in bringing this to pass, but we won't be resting on any laurels. The Assembly have the powers to pass laws which will protect and improve workers' rights and trade unions will continue to work to advance the economic and social interests of working people across the island of Ireland."

"There can be no doubt in what collective action by members can achieve, we're inviting all workers across Northern Ireland to get involved. By joining a trade union, you'll be joining the largest civil society organisation on the island of Ireland."

- In a recent poll, 44% of 18-34-year-olds in employment stated they would be interested in joining a union. Their leading reasons for doing so were that trade unions:
- Provide employment protection in the workplace, and
- Negotiate better pay and conditions.

"In our recent poll, we asked people why they hadn't yet joined a trade union, and the most common response was 'nobody ever asked me to'. The Better in a Trade Union campaign, culminating in Trade Union Week, is our ask to everyone – come to a Trade Union Week event, speak to a union rep in your workplace, find out more on unions.ie. You will find a union that will fight for your rights to better pay, working conditions and job security."

Ronan Sharkey, NASUWT and ICTU Youth Committee added:

"Being part of a union is hugely beneficial for workers who want to ensure that they are being paid fairly and treated fairly in their workplace. Being active in my trade union and the wider trade union movement has meant that I feel part of a larger community. This has had a really positive impact on my career and means my voice is being heard."



ICTU delegation with NIO minister Fleur Anderson

G3 Employment Bill

The consultation for the 'Good Jobs' Employment Bill closed at the end of September 2024.

The next stage for the legislation will be when the Bill is presented to the NI Assembly, hopefully at the beginning of 2025. The legislation takes nine stages to Royal Assent and must be completed before the next Assembly election in spring 2027.

Here are the core recommendations NIC-ICTU has made in the consultation, a position echoed by every affiliate and many of our friends and allies across civil society. An extensive lobbying exercise is underway and will continue until the completion of this project, the most comprehensive Employment Act in generations.

Tackling Insecure Forms of Work and Promoting Genuine Flexibility

NIC-ICTU recommend the following:

1. Ban the use of exploitative contracts such as ZHCs, by requiring employers to provide guaranteed contractual hours per week for all roles from day one. This could be achieved by introducing a banded hours system with workers placed on a band reflecting the average hours they actually work (for workers already on a contract that does not stipulate guaranteed hours) or will be required to work (for new starts). Merely granting the worker the right to request such a change will leave the most vulnerable workers stuck in their precarious employment situation.
2. A legal duty should be placed on employers to consider for all jobs, the potential for predictability of the work patterns including the number of hours worked, the days of the week and the times worked on those days,



Briefing for TU leaders and policy experts

and the duration of the contract where applicable.

3. All temporary and agency workers who are working in the same job for more than one year should have the right to request that they become permanent employees of the organisation they have been placed with. The organisation should not be able to refuse the request without objective justification, and it should not have to provide any fees to the agency that provided the worker. Likewise, any employee on fixed-term contracts for one or more years should automatically become a permanent employee if requested.
4. Improve rights to genuine flexibility of working arrangements through,
 - A change in the law so that employers must publish flexible working options in job adverts, or justify why the job can't be done flexibly
 - A right for successful candidates to take up the advertised flexibility from day one
 - All workers to get the right to request flexible working at any stage in their employment. All roles should be deemed suitable for flexibility unless it can be shown that the
5. Put an end to the injustice of a three-tier workforce - Ensure that all workers benefit from the same employment rights, including protection from unfair dismissal, by creating a single "worker" status for all but the genuinely self-employed. Create a statutory presumption that all individuals will qualify as 'worker' under the new definition, unless the employer can demonstrate in an employment tribunal, should a dispute arise, that they are genuinely self-employed.
6. Day one employment rights - Remove the arbitrary and unfair qualifying time periods that restrict access to employment rights, particularly for insecure workers. Introduce a day one right to the protections and benefits of statutory employment rights.
7. That those in self-employment, whilst not qualifying for full employment protection, should still benefit from an improved safety-net of work-related benefits, including statutory maternity, paternity and adoption pay, statutory sick pay and auto-enrolment into pensions.
8. legislation should be introduced to require all employment agencies to be licenced. The Employment Agency

unavailability is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim, such as an objective business need. The financial cost cannot, by itself, provide a justification.

- Introduce a formal "right to return" to the original working pattern at the end of an agreed period where the flexible working arrangements are limited in duration, and a right to request to return to the original pattern earlier in the event of a change of circumstances
- An appeal process should be introduced that allows individuals and their trade union to scrutinise and challenge the reasons given for rejecting a request.



Economy Minister Conor Murphy with ICTU and NASUWT lobbyists

Inspectors need to be better resourced to carry out unannounced inspections and greater powers to ensure that agencies are complying with their worker's statutory employment rights. Further to this, NIC-ICTU recommend that the EAI should be combined with other statutory enforcement agencies to create a single enforcement body adequately resourced and empowered to enforce workers employment and health and safety rights.

9. Use public procurement to improve employment models. Requirements should be introduced to public sector contracts for the supply of goods and services, to incentivise companies to improve their workforce policies and practices ensuring they are compliant with employment rights legislation and best practice, minimise the use of non-standard, temporary and agency contracts, and promote permanent employment. Companies that do not meet the requirements should not be awarded a public contract.

Reform of Employment Tribunals and Introduction of a Single Enforcement Body

NIC-ICTU believe that the Industrial and Fair Employment Tribunals system is a necessary, but not ideal system for accessing employment rights and workplace dispute resolution.

NIC-ICTU recommend the following:

1. Extend the time limits for lodging tribunal cases to at least 6 months.
2. Introduce the power for employment tribunals to make recommendations where appropriate when employers are found to have breached statutory employment rights.
3. Introduce the power for employment tribunals to provide greater enforcement measures for reinstatement and reengagement orders.
4. Remove the caps that limit the compensation workers can receive.

5. Amend the legislation to ensure that the tripartite model is more clearly enshrined in the regulations to reflect the community the tribunal system serves, with the panel containing one member with experience as a trade union trade representative and one with experience as an employer representative sitting alongside a legally qualified judge.
6. The current system for enforcing employment tribunal awards is not fit for purpose. Successful claimants must take further action to receive their award if the employer chooses not to pay. There should be proactive enforcement of unpaid tribunal awards. Empowering employment tribunals themselves, to monitor and enforce the payment of tribunal awards would be an effective solution. New powers should be introduced enabling employment tribunals to recover compensation owed to workers and to impose sanctions on employers who do not pay tribunal awards.
7. Alternatively, power to enforce tribunal awards could be given to a new single enforcement body.



SDLP leader Claire Hanna
and ICTU President Justin McCamphill

Ban Fire and Rehire practices and Strengthen Protection from Redundancy

NIC-ICTU believe that early awareness of the business difficulties allows for effective intervention to explore alternative strategies to avoid redundancies/fire and rehire and thereby, retain skills.

NIC-ICTU recommend that the legislative changes at points 1 to 8, 11, and 12, below, should also apply to all potential redundancy situations as well as in cases where hire and rehire is threatened.

NIC-ICTU recommend that existing legislation be amended to:

1. Ensure that the duty of an employer to consult representatives of employees must commence when the employer is "contemplating" redundancies/fire and rehire rather than "proposing to dismiss as redundant/fire and rehire."
2. Remove the statutory numerical thresholds for triggering (redundancy) consultations, include workers as well as employees in the process and extend the consultation period to 90-days at least in all redundancy/dismissal and re-engagement cases.
3. Consultations must start 90-days before any dismissal process commences.
4. State explicitly that no notices of dismissal can be given until the consultation process is completed.
5. Likewise, state explicitly that no workers should be identified through, for example the introduction of selection criteria or the defining of roles, until the consultation process is completed.
6. Consultations must be thorough, meaningful, and in good faith with a view to reaching an agreement with the requirement on the employer to adequately demonstrate a business case for failing to accept proposals made by employee representatives to avoid compulsory redundancies/fire and rehire.



Jim Quinn, Carmel Gates and Kevin Doherty at the DUP conference



Paul Maskey MP with Paddy, Justin and Gerry at SF Ard Fheis

7. All information must be provided to the representatives on the economic state of the organisation without which the representatives would be to a material extent impeded in carrying on meaningful consultation with the employer.
8. Consultations to avoid redundancies/ fire and rehire should not be restricted unnecessarily to units within the business enterprise.
9. Make protection from dismissal a 'day one' right for employees and workers in cases of dismissal and re-engagement. This can be done ahead of moves to replace both categories with the single status of 'worker' and the removal of qualifying periods for all employment rights.
10. Extend the application of 'interim relief' to employees and workers in cases of dismissal and re-engagement, thereby maintaining the contracts in place pending a full tribunal hearing. Where these dismissals are adjudged 'unfair', the primary remedy should be reinstatement (the employee returns to their previous job) or re-engagement (the employee is re-employed by the employer on terms specified by the employment tribunal). The caps on compensation awards should be removed.
11. Provide that the redundancy/fire and rehire will be unfair if the employer had reasonable economic alternatives, and that the statutory specification of relevant factors a tribunal must consider when assessing 'fairness' should include the 'equity' of the proposed contractual changes, i.e. It should be highly relevant to a decision as to fairness for a tribunal to consider upon whom of the workforce those cuts would fall.
12. Provide that when assessing the reasonableness of the dismissal it is relevant to consider whether the employer had genuinely consulted with representatives in good faith with a view to reaching an agreement and had made available to the representatives all information on the economic state of the organisation without which the representatives would be to a material extent impeded in carrying on meaningful consultation with the employer.
13. Provide independent trade unions the right to access workplaces during working hours to meet, recruit, consult and represent the workforce.
14. Make it easier for trade unions to take immediate action by relaxing the procedural requirements on unions before they can take lawful industrial action where the trade dispute relates to the protection of terms and conditions of employment in situations where fire and rehire tactics are being implemented by an employer.



Robin Swann MP and Kevin Doherty

15. Introduce the offence of personal liability as it relates to the statutory redundancy notification process with no maximum fine cap.
16. Introduce legislation that prohibits the use of wide contractual powers that enable employers to vary terms and conditions unilaterally.

NIC-ICTU also recommend the introduction of measures to protect jobs and skills for the benefit of the economy and society by, for example, providing support for the option of continuing a business as a worker cooperative on occasions when an employer seeks to wind up a business or can no longer continue a business, for whatever reason, that could still be viable.

Collective Bargaining

NIC-ICTU recommend that the new employment rights bill should contain the following provisions which place actions on the Department for the Economy with the aim of increasing collective bargaining coverage and of facilitating the exercise of the right to collective bargaining:

1. Promote the building and strengthening of the capacity of the social partners



Matthew O'Toole with Justin and Sally Rees (NASUWT)

- (employers and trade unions) to engage in collective bargaining on wage-setting and other terms and conditions of employment, in particular at sector or cross-industry level.
2. Encourage constructive, meaningful and informed negotiations on wages and other terms and conditions of employment between the social partners, on an equal footing, where both parties have access to appropriate information in order to carry out such negotiations.
3. Take measures, as appropriate, to protect the exercise of the right to collective bargaining and to protect workers and trade union representatives from acts that discriminate against them in respect of their employment on the grounds that they participate or wish to participate in collective bargaining on the matters referred to above.
4. For the purpose of promoting collective bargaining on wage-setting and other terms and conditions, take measures,



UUP deputy leader Robbie Butler with Jim Quinn (FBU) and Kevin Doherty

as appropriate, to protect trade unions and employers' organisations participating or wishing to participate in collective bargaining against any acts of interference by each other or each other's agents or members in their establishment, functioning or administration.

5. Provide for a framework of enabling conditions for collective bargaining, either by law after consulting the social partners or by agreement with them.
6. Establish an action plan to promote collective bargaining after consulting the social partners. The action plan shall set out a clear timeline and concrete measures to progressively increase the rate of collective bargaining coverage, in full respect for the autonomy of the social partners.
7. Review its action plan regularly, at least every three years, and update it if needed after consulting the social partners or by agreement with them.

Four Pillars for Strong Collective bargaining

The reversal of many of the pieces of Conservative government's legislation restricting trade unions is key to rebuilding strong unions, as identified by the ILO as one of the enabling conditions for social dialogue and collective bargaining.



SDLP Economy spokesperson Sinead McLaughlin, Justin and Karen Murray (RCM)

For trade unions, collective bargaining and strengthening unions rests upon four pillars:

1. The ability to access the workplace to recruit, consult and represent workers.
2. Recognition of the union by employers to negotiate on all terms and conditions of employment.
3. Protections for workplace union representatives against harassment and detrimental treatment including dismissal.
4. The ability to collectively withdraw services for the purposes of negotiating terms and conditions, and in defence of their member's interests and the workplace organisation.

Right for Trade Unions to Access Workplaces

NIC-ICTU recommend the following:

1. Where a union member requests the support of their union on an



- employment-related matter, the union representative should have an automatic right to access the workplace (following the legislation in New Zealand).
- Independent unions should have the right to access workplaces during working hours to meet, recruit, consult and represent the workforce, and to ensure compliance with health and safety and employment legislation. This should include atypical workplaces.
 - Union access to workplaces where they currently have no members would require seeking employer consent, which could not be unreasonably withheld. A failure to respond within two days would be treated as consent (again following the New Zealand model).
 - Where organisations are broken up and services outsourced, union representatives should have the right to represent workers and access workplaces across the new structures.
 - As it is increasingly common for people to work remotely, or across multiple workplaces, rather than being based in a single site, unions need new rights to access workers digitally. Otherwise, there is a danger that these workers will lose out on the protection of union membership and collective bargaining. Therefore, the following should also be in the bill.



Kevin, Karen and Davy Nichol (CSP)

- New rights should be created that protect the ability of unions, members and working people to use social media, digital and other tools as part of workplace campaigns. This must include a "digital right of access".
- A digital right of access would give unions the right to reasonable electronic communication with workers. Employers would be required to forward union communications to the workforce but would not pass workers' contact details to the union without their permission.
- All employers should be required to provide a physical and/or digital notice board where union materials can be displayed that can be accessed by all workers.

Trade Union Recognition

NIC-ICTU recommend the following:

- The 21-minimum employee threshold should be removed, allowing more enterprises to be covered by the statutory recognition rights.
- As referred to earlier in this document, unions should have access to the workplace to communicate with, meet, consult, recruit, and represent the workforce. The Industrial Court (IC) should be empowered to enforce such access (potentially with the threat of automatic recognition) at the earliest stage of the statutory recognition process.
- Where a union can establish that over 10% of the bargaining unit is in trade union membership and evidence of majority support for recognition, automatic recognition should be granted, with no requirement for a ballot.
- Where ballots are to be held, the 40% requirement to vote for recognition of the overall bargaining unit should be removed. A simple majority of workers voting in the recognition ballot should suffice.



Lisa Wilson (NERI), 'Critical Friend on Good Jobs' to the Economy Minister

5. Ballots should have the facility to be held electronically, by post or at the workplace.
6. Where the IC issues a declaration granting recognition to a union with an employer, recognition should not be rescinded other than by the mutual consent.
7. Unions should have the right to relevant information from the employer in order to determine an appropriate bargaining unit (potentially with the threat of automatic recognition).
8. Unions should have the right to propose reasonable adjustments, where material conditions have changed since the application was made, to the bargaining unit during the recognition process.
9. In large, multi-site organisations, unions that have recognition within one bargaining unit should have the ability to organise and ballot in other potential bargaining units across the organisation without reaching the 10% membership threshold within the additional unit or workforce group.
10. As referred to above, an 'unfair practice' constitutes a practice used during a union recognition ballot that would unfairly influence the result of the ballot. These rules should be reformed to ensure that any actions of an employer to frustrate a unions recognition bid are covered, they should only apply to employers.
11. The current requirement on unions to demonstrate a causal link between unfair labour practices and workers' decisions on how to vote should be removed.
12. 'Unfair practices' by employers opposing recognition should be more vigorously prohibited. The only recourse, at present, open to workers is to take Tribunal claims. The relevant legislation needs to be amended to ensure that Employment Tribunals can award financial penalties and enforce reinstatement of workers dismissed in relation to the union recognition process. The Industrial Court should be given the power to grant automatic recognition if such practices occur, with the burden of proof being on the employer to show that the practice complained of is not unfair.
13. Remove the existing three-year rule which restricts a union from re-submitting an unsuccessful application.
14. The effective management criteria should be removed, employers have tried to argue that in effect collective bargaining is incompatible with effective management. The litmus test should be 'is effective bargaining possible' and not whether collective bargaining is compatible with effective management. No consideration should be given to supposed bargaining units outside of the one specified by the union in its application.

15. The existing scope of collective bargaining defined in legislation should be broadened to mandate employers who recognise a trade union to negotiate on 'all terms and conditions of employment and work organisation.'
16. Currently, under the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, the Industrial Court is required to *'have regard to the object of encouraging and promoting fair and efficient practices and arrangements in the workplace'*. This should be reformed so that the IC is required to: *'promote collective bargaining in the workplace, while having regard to the object of encouraging and promoting fair and efficient practices and arrangements in the workplace'*, as per the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association.
17. In judging a proposed bargaining unit, the IC should be required to take account of *'the fact that workers having a collective voice in the workplace is desirable'*.

In addition, NIC-ICTU recommend that the IC membership process should ensure that the tripartite model is more clearly enshrined in the regulations to reflect the community it serves, with the chair being from a legal background with a panel containing one member with experience as a trade union trade representative and one with experience as an employer representative.

Industrial Action

While NIC-ICTU consider that introducing the positive right to strike would best meet Northern Ireland's obligations under international conventions and bring us into line with the rights of our European colleagues, **NIC-ICTU recommend** that the proposed employment bill should include, at least, the following.

1. The current requirement on trade unions to give an employer notice that a ballot is to take place and notice of the action unnecessarily duplicates the bureaucratic duties on trade unions without serving any clear policy objective. Therefore, remove the requirement on unions to give employers notice of a ballot. Unions would still be normally required to give five days' notice of the proposed start of industrial action.
2. Remove the requirement that a sample voting paper be provided to the employer in advance of the ballot and reduce the notice period for industrial action from seven days to five.
3. To reduce the burden on unions and to protect them from injunctions due to administrative errors, unions should only be required to provide information relating to the category of workers being called to take action; the nature of the industrial action, i.e. whether it will be a strike or action short of a strike; and when action will commence and whether it will be continuous or discontinuous.
4. For the same reason, a new duty should be introduced for employers, when requested, to supply unions with information which they need to comply with notice and balloting requirements. This duty is similar to current duties in the statutory recognition scheme. Where the employer refuses to supply the necessary information, any subsequent application for an interim injunction to prevent industrial action should fail.
5. At the moment, a trade union will not lose its protection from taking industrial action where it accidentally fails to ballot an insignificant number of those it intends to induce to take industrial action. This provision should be extended to the effect that a union would not lose its immunity for taking industrial action where it accidentally includes an insignificant amount of inaccurate information in a notice to the employer.

6. Broaden the range of options by which union members can vote in an industrial action ballot, including workplace voting, including through the provision of electronic voting. This complements the option of a voting paper being sent to a member by means other than post, where required for reasons of personal safety.
7. The requirement to provide employers five days' notice of the proposed start of industrial action should be relaxed where the trade dispute relates to the dismissal or imminent dismissal of any category of trade union representative, and to protect terms and conditions of employment in situations where fire and rehire tactics are being implemented by an employer.
8. Amend the law to provide that employers would only be able to gain an injunction to stop industrial action where they have demonstrated that they are more likely to succeed than the union once the legal action is considered by a court.

Currently only 'employees' are protected from unfair dismissal for 12 weeks of strike action. If dismissed for taking part after the end of the 12 weeks the dismissal will only be unfair if, at the time of dismissal, the employer has not followed reasonable steps to settle the dispute with the union, e.g. if the employer has unreasonably refused a request by the union to involve a third party to conciliate a settlement.

Existing protections for those taking part in lawful industrial action only apply to those who legally qualify as 'employees'. As a result, agency workers, 'casuals' and freelancers are all excluded from protection when taking industrial action, despite the fact that an increasing proportion of the working population are in non-standard employment relationships,

1. Introduce measures which ensure that all workers have the right to take official industrial action free from the fear of dismissal or victimisation. Any dismissal of a worker would be void and ineffective unless the employer can show that the reason for the dismissal was not connected to the industrial action. Workers would be able to enforce these rights through the courts. [This action would become unnecessary should the proposed employment bill introduce a single status of 'worker', in place of the current distinct categories of employee and worker]
2. Strengthen unfair dismissal protection for employees who have participated, are participating, or are proposing to participate in official industrial action regardless of the length of the industrial action. Workers would have the right to automatic reinstatement where they request it.
3. Introduce the right for all workers not to be subjected to any detriment because they have participated, are participating, or are proposing to participate in official industrial action.
4. Employers may prolong industrial action, by hiring replacement labour, rather than entering into early and genuine negotiations in order to reach a sensible resolution to a dispute. As the existing law only places duties on agencies not to supply agency workers during industrial action, place equivalent duties on employers not to use agency workers to replace striking workers.
5. Remove the current bar on industrial action where there has been a prior call. The Midlands Mainline Ltd vs RMT case highlighted that currently a union cannot rectify a prior unofficial call to take industrial action by repudiating the call and then seeking to conduct a proper ballot.



6. In recent years, business restructuring and contracting out have become more prevalent but the law on industrial action has not evolved to respond to these changes. The provisions of a new employment bill should permit lawful industrial action, having complied with statutory notice and balloting requirements, between workers and their employer and any associated employer in certain circumstances such as TUPE transfers (as was the case in *University College Hospital NHS Trust v UNISON* [1999] ICR 204), where a second employer has directly intervened contributing to the circumstances surrounding a dispute (where work is outsourced to break the strike), or, where groups of workers are employed by associated employers, i.e. employers with common management or decision-making structures.
7. Remove the bar on prison officers taking industrial action.

Greater Protections for Trade Union Reps and Increased Rights for H&S Reps

NIC-ICTU recommend the following:

1. It should not be lawful to dismiss a union representative except for good cause, requiring the prior approval of an independent body which has considered the facts, and whose decision would be subject to review at an employment tribunal. Dispute resolution mechanisms established through sectoral collective bargaining structures could provide for such an independent body.
2. Where a 'trade dispute' relates to the dismissal or imminent dismissal of a trade union rep, the procedural restrictions on trade unions taking industrial action should be relaxed to allow for early defensive action to facilitate the protection of union reps, thereby potentially reducing the 'cost to the public purse' of tribunal proceedings.

3. The powers of Employment Tribunals to enforce reinstatement and re-engagement orders of unfairly dismissed trade union reps must be increased to close the loophole that allows employers to refuse to comply with these orders.
4. Introduce statutory rights for trade union equalities representatives.
5. Ensure there is sufficient facilities time for all trade union representatives so that they have capacity to represent and defend workers, negotiate with employers and train.

NIC-ICTU believe that there is also a need for legislation to extend the protections provided by Health and Safety Representatives (H&S) across workplaces to enhance the right of workers to participate in health and safety matters, including:

1. In the absence of a recognised trade union, an appropriate trade union should have the right to appoint health and safety representatives even though the union is not recognised by the employer for any other purpose. 'Roving H&S Reps' would have the power to gain entry to any workplace and carry out their health and safety functions. Such a right currently exists for two unions in the entertainment sector. Research for the HSE has found that the use of union-appointed safety representatives in agriculture (and associated rural businesses) in a "roving" or peripatetic capacity and on a national basis is both practical and feasible (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/Research/rrpdf/rr417.pdf>).
2. A recognised or appropriate trade union should have rights of access to workplaces in which it has members and to undertake inspections where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that there may be non-compliance with health and safety laws.



3. Trade union officials and/or safety representatives should be empowered to issue provisional improvement notices and to stop work they deem to be dangerous.
4. Trade unions should have the power to initiate private prosecutions in respect of suspected health and safety offences, the costs in doing so recoverable from the State or the employer.
5. Extend H&S protections to those in non-standard employment by reforming the general duty imposed by the Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978 so that obligations are imposed on 'persons conducting a business or an undertaking', rather than 'employers.' Extending this new duty so that it applies not only to employees, but to workers 'engaged, or caused to be engaged', by such persons and to those 'whose activities in carrying out work are influenced or directed' by them.

Work-Life Balance

NIC-ICTU recommend that the Department for the Economy commit to a comprehensive and timely review of Work Life Balance measures to include a review of pay and leave entitlements as well as strengthened rights to flexible leave entitlements as well as access to family leaves (maternity, paternity, parental, carers leave, bereavement leave/s) pay and entitlements.

NIC-ICTU recommends the following measures:

- Enabling a cultural shift in the workplace
- Tackling inequalities in the labour market
- Ensuring that availing of work life balance measures do not come at the cost of financial security. Accessing family leave in it's broadest sense should not impose financial penalties or discriminate against families who cannot afford to lose income.
- Cutting the gender, disability and race pay gap

- Ensuring parental leave is accessible for single parent families and other disadvantaged families
- Reducing pregnancy and maternity discrimination
- Enable fathers/partners to spend significant time as primary carers for their children.

Right to Disconnect

NIC-ICTU recommend the following:

The Right to Disconnect is based on the principle of the Workers' right to switch off from work outside of working hours without suffering any negative consequences for doing so. The Right to Disconnect must be defined in regulation.

Carer's Leave

NIC-ICTU recommend the following:

1. Carers Leave should be a paid right and be properly remunerated to be an effective support to workers who are also caregivers and be made available to all workers, regardless of employment status. This should be funded in the same way as other leave entitlements but should be included in a comprehensive review of Work Life Balance arrangements.
2. We further believe that workers should be able to self-certify their eligibility for carer's leave, this could mirror the process for self-certification for sickness.
3. The definition of Carers Leave needs to cover the necessary breadth of caring relationships. The list of those able to take carers leave should be widely drawn and include the following a child/stepchild, partner or parent of the employee, someone else who lives with employee as a member of their family, or someone who relies on the employee in an emergency. Employers

should be asked to interpret this flexibly. Short term care should be within the scope of the definition of Carers Leave.

Neonatal Care Leave and Pay

4. **NIC-ICTU** recommend that miscarriage be defined in regulations as “a spontaneous loss of pregnancy before 24 weeks and includes all pregnancy losses from the time of conception until 24 weeks gestation” as this would include ectopic pregnancies, non-viable pregnancies, pregnancies through assisted conception such as IVF as well as the termination of pregnancies for any other reason.

Given that these regulations have not yet been progressed, we recommend that this provision is included in the scope of the Employment Bill. **NIC-ICTU further recommend** that the definition of miscarriage is as above and that the word ‘unintentional’ is removed from the definition.

Protection from Redundancy – Pregnancy and Family Leave

NIC-ICTU recommend the following:

1. The protected period begins at the start of a woman’s pregnancy. If instances occur where a woman is selected for redundancy and she has not informed her employer about her pregnancy, the redundancy decision should be reviewed to ensure that it has not been taken as a result of pregnancy.
2. protections from redundancy during relevant family leave should be extended to include a period after the employee returns from leave.
3. The period of protection should be 18 months from when the child is born, stillborn, expected to be born, or is placed for adoption.

4. Enhanced protections should apply to anyone who has taken a minimum period of SPL (i.e. one week). As SPL is flexible in nature, it is unrealistic to apply it to continuous period of leave – this should be reviewed.

Paternity Leave

NIC-ICTU recommend the following:

1. A period of mandatory paternity leave for at least four weeks for fathers and second parents remunerated fairly at a rate which ensures families do not incur a major financial penalty and to meet the objective of increasing paternal involvement in the early years.
2. This mandatory period of leave should be considered as separate and distinct to a parent’s right to leave.





2024 Biennial Delegate Conference

Irish Congress of Trade Unions

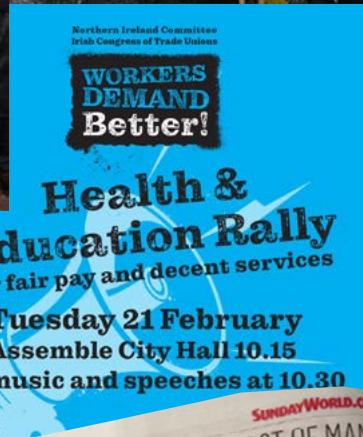
G Industrial Relations

G4 Industrial Action

In the two years since the last BDC, more industrial action has been mandated by members and carried through to strike action in more than a century. The background is outlined in Section E1 of this report.

The following pages are reminders of the scale of what was endured and achieved by thousands of working people working together for a shared aim and the common good.







G

Industrial Relations



Carmel Gates (NIPSA)



Claire Ronald (CSP)



Cora Regan (SoR)



Denise Walker (GMB)





CWU's Erin Massey and Kerry Fleck



Gayle Mathews (PCS)



Helen Crickard Belfast TC



Gerry Susan Jackie



Paddy Mackel (UCU)



Supporting NUJ's Seamus Dooley and Newsletter's Phillip Bradfield



NUJ Gerry Murphy speaks to Sarah Clarke, UTV 18 Jan





Gerry Murphy



Paul Whiteman (NAHT)



Mark McTaggart (INTO)



Karen Murray (RCM)



Niall McNally (SIPTU)



Katherine Clarke (UCU)





G

Industrial Relations



Seamus Dooley (NUJ)



Stephanie Greenwood (Unison)



UCU

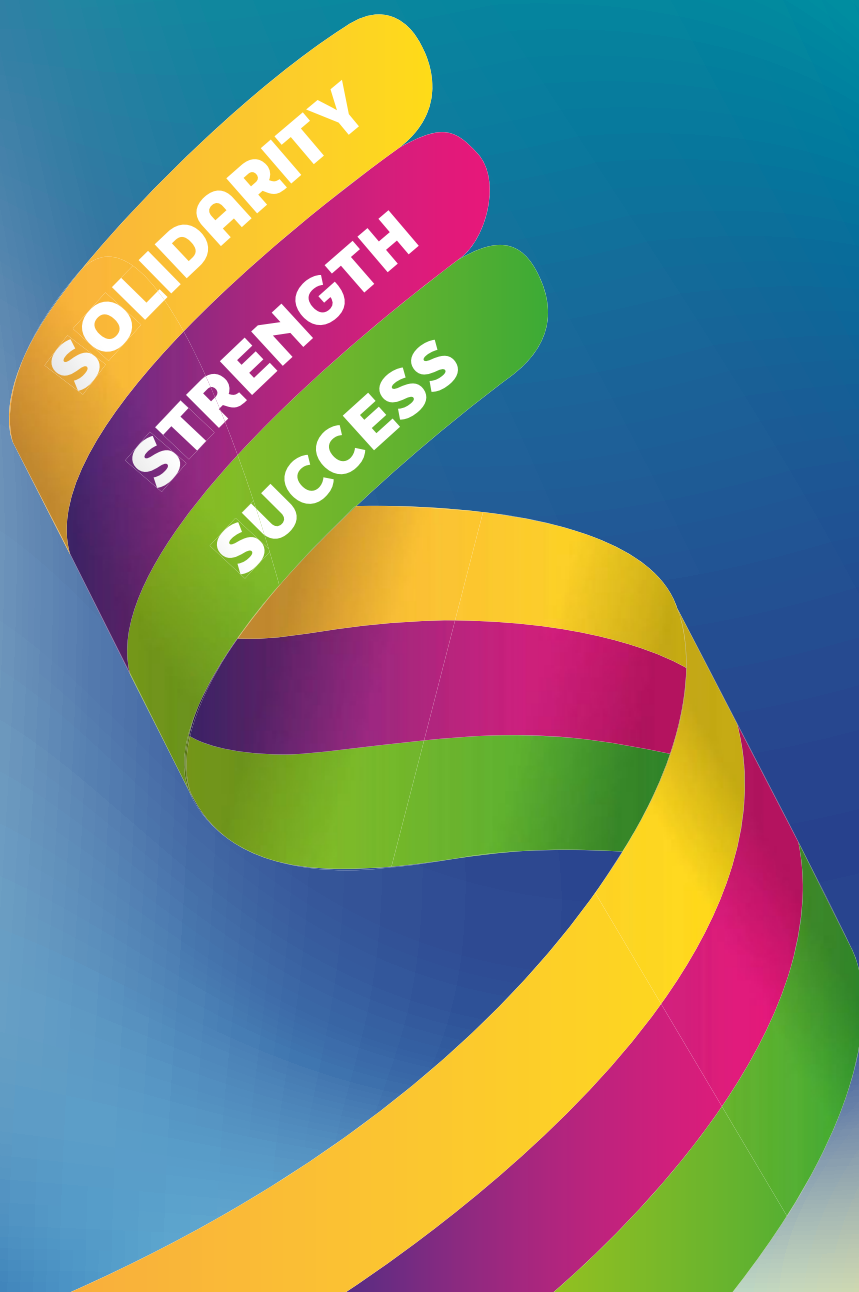


Speakers at strike rally in early 2023



Section H

APPENDICES



BDC24



Appendix 1: Standing Orders

1. Northern Ireland Conference

- 1.1 The Northern Ireland Conference shall meet biennially. The place and date shall be decided by the Northern Ireland Committee, subject to the approval of the Executive Council.
- 1.2 The Chairperson for the Sessions of the Conference shall be the Chairperson of the outgoing Northern Ireland Committee.
- 1.3 A Conference Arrangements Committee of five persons and two substitutes, elected at the previous Northern Ireland Conference, shall be responsible for the arrangements of the business of Conference, and generally take charge of the meeting place.

2. Representation

Only bona fide members or full-time officials who are members of an affiliated trade union and resident in Ireland may be appointed as delegates in accordance with the following scales:

- a. Trade unions with an affiliated membership in Northern Ireland of less than 1000 members = one delegate

Trade unions having an affiliated membership in Northern Ireland of:-

1000	members but less than	2000	=	2	delegates
2000	" " "	3000	=	3	"
3000	" " "	4000	=	4	"
4000	" " "	5000	=	5	"
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31000	"	"	"	33000	=	25	"
33000	"	"	"	35000	=	26	"
35000	"	"	"	37000	=	27	"
37000	"	"	"	39000	=	28	"
39000	"	"	"	42000	=	29	"
42000	"	"	"	45000	=	30	"

and one delegate for each 3000 members above 45000 and up to 75000 and thereafter in accordance with Paragraph 37 of the Constitution of Congress.

Trade Unions must include women delegates in their delegation in accordance with the following scale:

- b. Trade Unions having an affiliated membership in Northern Ireland of more than 500 but less than 1000 women shall appoint at least one woman delegate.

Trade Unions having in Northern Ireland:-

Women Membership

Women Delegates

1000 but less than 5000	at least	2
5000 but less than 10000	"	3
10000 but less than 15000	"	4
15000 but less than 20000	"	5

and at least one woman delegate for each 5000 women members above 20,000.

- c. Local Councils of Trade Unions may appoint delegates (who must be members of affiliated trade unions) to the Conference in accordance with the following scale:-

Up to 6500 affiliated membership	1 delegate
Over 6500 affiliated membership	2 delegates

3. Motions

- 3.1 Affiliated organisations may submit up to three motions for the Conference Agenda. Motions must be signed by the authorised official of the organisation and forwarded to Congress not later than the date specified in the notice to organisations.
- 3.2 The Northern Ireland Committee may submit up to three motions for the Conference Agenda.
- 3.3 Motions must be within the scope of the Objects of Congress as set out in the Constitution. They must relate to the matters provided for in Paragraph 37 of the Constitution, viz "matters relating to the internal, industrial, economic and political conditions of Northern Ireland, and of direct concern to Northern Ireland members only". The Executive Council shall determine whether motions submitted are in order and its decision shall be final.

4. Business of Conference

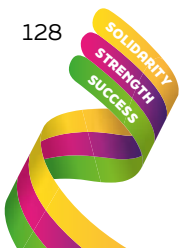
The business of Conference may include the following items:

- a. The Report of the Northern Ireland Committee
- b. Special Reports from the Northern Ireland Committee
- c. Motions from affiliated organisations and the Northern Ireland Committee
- d. Guest speaker/s invited by the Northern Ireland Committee

5. Election of Northern Ireland Committee and Conference Arrangements Committee

The election of the Northern Ireland Committee (NIC) will be conducted using the single transferable vote system. The Congress Constitution provides that the election of the Northern Ireland Committee must result in the election of at least four women.

In the event that only four women are nominated for election to the Northern Ireland Committee, prior to the vote commencing these candidates will be declared elected and an election will be held to elect a further 14 members of the committee using the single transferable vote system.



In the event that there are more than four women nominated for election to the Northern Ireland Committee a single election will be held using the single transferable vote system. If the outcome of the election of the Northern Ireland Committee results in less than four women being elected then the following procedure should apply. The last man to be elected amongst the 18 should be replaced by the last woman to be eliminated. In the event that this does not result in four women being elected then the second last man to be elected shall be replaced by the second last woman to be eliminated and so on until the minimum requirement of four women is met.

Nominations of persons for election as members of the Northern Ireland Committee (18 members, including four Reserved Seats for Women and one Reserved Seat for Councils of Trade Unions) and of the Conference Arrangements Committee (5 members plus 2 substitutes) may be made by any affiliated trade union entitled to representation at the Conference. Each nomination must be signed by the authorised official of the nominating union and must be forwarded so as to reach Congress not later than four weeks prior to the date of Conference. Nominations must be confined to persons who are delegates to Conference. A nomination shall not be made without the expressed consent of the person nominated.

Nominations for the Conference Arrangements Committee must be persons who are delegates to Conference, and may not be a member of the incoming Northern Ireland Committee.

A list of persons nominated as members of the Northern Ireland Committee and of the Conference Arrangements Committee will be sent to each affiliated organisation and to delegates not later than two weeks prior to the date of Conference.

6. Methods of Voting on Motions and Reports

Voting at Conference shall be confined to delegates and be by a show of hands, each delegate having one vote. Four delegates shall be appointed as Tellers.

7. Limitation of Speeches

The Conference Arrangements Committee shall make recommendations to Conference on time limits of speeches. No speaker shall speak more than once on the same question except the mover of a motion replying to the discussion.

8. Executive Council

Executive Council members and Congress Officials are entitled to attend Conference. Officials may speak as appropriate on motions or reports.

9. Other Matters

Matters not covered by these Standing Orders in principle shall be dealt with in accordance with the Standing Orders of Congress.

Appendix 2:

Motions by Sector

NIC-ICTU

1. Tackling violent extremism

Conference condemns the outrageous display of racial and ethnic hatred on display in the centre of Belfast last August. An open demonstration of ignorant racist rhetoric was followed by street violence and vandalism aimed at people from ethnic or minority backgrounds, their property, residences and businesses. This took place against a backdrop of vicious attacks on people and their homes and property across Northern Ireland.

Conference also condemns the spread of misinformation online and those who defend the indefensible and untrue in the name of 'free speech'. Simply telling lies to support the violent exclusion of any group of people is not justified in any democratic society.

This movement has a long history of anti-fascism and this conference commends those who exercised that tradition in August. Counter-protests on the streets were instrumental in curtailing these visible displays of hatred, but this movement has also taken actions which are additional tools in the endless campaigning in support of reason and tolerance, such as:

- Championing the social, economic and cultural benefits of greater societal diversity;
- Recognising the essential role played by migrant workers in delivering public services and contributing to growing all sectors of our economy;
- Challenging and campaigning together with allies across civil society against

many of the underlying social problems blamed for breeding racism;

- We have done this with fact-based arguments and reasonable economic solutions;
- Rejecting the scapegoating tactics of the far-right and their apologists.
- Utilising trade union education as a vital tool for workplace representatives in ensuring safe and united workplaces.
- Working with groups which represent minorities and developing their capacity to take leadership roles in civil society and in our movement.
- Making the connection with existing prejudices such as sectarianism, misogyny and anti-LGBTQI attitudes and challenging those social evils at every opportunity.

Conference commends those trade union educators and the work in recent months of the ICTU's Anti-Racist Workplaces Project Coordinator whose support is available for every affiliate to develop their own ambassadors in support of the true values of this movement.

Conference also seeks to reinvigorate our long-standing demands for the NI Executive, its devolved ministries and statutory agencies to:

- Deepen the impact of existing initiatives such as the Joint Declaration of Protection,
- Revitalise and deliver the long-promised Racial Equality Strategy as well as other social inclusion strategies
- Develop and enforce effective Hate Crime legislation.

The long-term work is ongoing and developing, but short-term measures

are also required, such as developing our capacity to quickly and effectively respond to incidents on the streets or in workplaces, conscious of the first priority for any public manifestation – that everyone gets home safely and remains secure there, at work and on the streets.

UNISON

2. Challenging racism and all forms of hatred and promoting rights and equality for all

Conference condemns the incidents of violence, racism and hate crime that have increased in recent months and have seriously impacted black and minority ethnic communities, including our members and their families.

Conference expresses its profound sorrow at the death of UNISON member Anu Okasanya. Anu's tragic and avoidable death followed a racist incident as she returned home from work. Conference offers its sincere condolences to Anu's family and friends.

Conference believes that it is completely unacceptable that racists and bigots can be allowed to put our members in harms' way.

Conference recalls the trade union movement's long and proud tradition of standing up for equality and human rights and against prejudice, bigotry and discrimination. Conference commends the efforts of the Northern Ireland Committee and affiliates in taking action to protect our members from harm and challenge racism, and calls on the Northern Ireland Committee to work with affiliates to ensure that this work continues and intensifies.

Conference calls on the Northern Ireland Committee to progress a campaign, working directly with affiliates, their own Black and Migrant Workers' membership structures and allied organisations to ensure

effective 'zero-tolerance' policies exist in the workplace and to ensure that the right supports are in place for workers affected by racism and discrimination.

In particular, conference calls on the Northern Ireland Committee to prioritise the widespread adoption and implementation of the Joint Declaration of Protection for Dignity at Work and Inclusive Working Environments by employers.

Conference further calls on the Northern Ireland Committee, working with wider civic society, to progress a campaign for strong hate crimes legislation and a renewed, effective Racial Equality strategy, taking into account the recent recommendations of the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in relation to Northern Ireland.

Conference reaffirms its commitment to seeking the full implementation of the rights-based commitments of the peace agreements, including through the introduction of single equality legislation and the implementation of the duty to promote equality of opportunity under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Conference calls on the Northern Ireland Committee to continue to campaign, both through its Equality and Human Rights sub-group and alongside our allies in the Equality Coalition, for the introduction of single equality legislation in Northern Ireland and for full compliance by public authorities with the section 75 duties, including through effective oversight and enforcement by the Equality Commission.

NIPSA

3. A Trade Union Response to Racism and the Far Right

Conference recognises the challenge presented by the rise of the organised far right groups and far right ideas.

The underlying causes are multi-faceted but there are fundamental issues that feed the far-right agenda.

Grinding poverty has driven many in society to despair. Political instability and the seemingly endless refugee crisis caused by rampant aggressive imperialism, and the active use of divide and rule tactics by mainstream politicians who adopt racist tropes, have all fed the far-right agenda.

Clearly the response of the trade union movement to these issues must also be multi-faceted. Our movement provides the beacon of hope for the future for the working class. We must raise that beacon ever higher so that even the most oppressed layers in society, here and internationally, can see a positive method of struggle to change their lives.

Conference recognises that alongside work to reach those who have been blindsided by far-right ideas, our movement must consider how we respond to the methods of the far-right that are a direct threat to the democratic interests of our movement. With that in mind, conference calls on Northern Committee of ICTU to establish a trade union member based stewarding group to provide support and protection, where needed, for meetings, protests, picket lines and demonstrations to ensure trade union members and the wider public can exercise their democratic rights.

NASUWT

4. Tackling the use of social media to promote extremist ideologies.

Conference observes that social media platforms have become an integral part of our daily lives offering unprecedented opportunities for communication, knowledge sharing, and social connection.

Conference considers that social media platforms also pose significant risks

including, most alarmingly, the exponential rise in the use of social media to propagate extremist ideologies.

Conference notes with concern how extremist individuals and groups have skilfully exploited these platforms to recruit members, spread disinformation, and incite hatred and violence.

Conference firmly believes that:

- educating people on how to navigate social media responsibly is essential to countering the spread of extremist ideologies;
- fostering digital literacy, critical thinking, and media awareness can empower individuals to identify and reject extremist content; and
- a well-informed and digitally literate population is better equipped to contribute to a peaceful, tolerant, and resilient society.

Conference calls on the ICTU to:

1. Respond with urgency to challenge the increasing exploitation of social media platform by extremist groups;
2. Lobby for tighter regulation, transparency and accountability for social media platforms and websites that enable extremist content;
3. Advocate for social media platforms to implement and promote educational tools that help users identify and report extremist content, while also protecting freedom of expression;
4. Urge governments, educational institutions, and social media companies to collaborate in developing comprehensive educational programmes that focus on digital literacy, critical thinking, and the dangers of online extremism;



5. Lobby for funding and training to enable schools to educate young people on how to navigate social media and extremist content;
6. Promote public awareness campaigns that highlight the risks associated with online extremism and provide practical guidance on how to navigate social media safely and responsibly; and
7. Support research initiatives aimed at understanding the psychological, social, and technological factors that contribute to the spread of extremism online, in order to inform more effective educational strategies.

NUJ

5. Abuse of journalists

This conference notes with concern the growing threat to media freedom in Northern Ireland.

The promotion and protection of independent journalism is essential to the functioning of a democratic society.

Attempts to undermine journalists and journalism, either by the State or extremist organisations and individuals, must be resisted.

Conference condemns the rise in threats to journalists, reported by the PSNI in September 2024.

Conference also notes the intimidation of reporters and photographers while covering Far Right protests and events through the Summer of 2024, notably in Belfast.

Far Right groups have also sought to intimidate journalists on social media, with female staff and freelance reporters being particular targets of abuse.

Conference extends solidarity to journalists and all workers subjected to intimidation in the course of their work by extremist groups with racist and sectarian ideologies.

Conference condemns the activities of Far Right activists in intimidating journalists and frontline workers, in furtherance of their political agenda.

Conference calls on the Northern Ireland Committee to work with the NUJ and sister unions to promote awareness of the need to protect media workers from attack while covering public events and demonstrations.

Conference demands a zero-tolerance approach towards such behaviour.

Conference reminds employers of their obligation to put in place appropriate measures to minimise risk to workers under their duty of care obligations.

UTU

6. Freedom from Intimidation and Harassment

The TNC 2023/2 Joint Declaration of Protection (for Dignity at Work & Inclusive Working Environment) contains the following commitments:

This Declaration is a joint Management Side and Teachers' Side agreement which recognises the moral and legal duties placed on Employers and Trade Unions as a result of fair employment legislation, anti-discrimination law and the Section 75 Statutory Equality Duty. This agreement aims to provide a work environment that fosters the dignity of its employees, is inclusive and where individual differences are valued and respected. This Joint Declaration Statement applies to all employees including staff contracted to work in schools to assist in the day to day running of the school.

Declaration

1. The Employing Authorities, Board of Governors and Teachers' Side declare that they condemn all acts of unlawful discrimination and harassment and that they are committed to ensuring that any acts of unlawful discrimination or harassment carried out will be vigorously opposed by both Management Side and the Teachers' Side.
2. The Employing Authorities, Board of Governors and Teachers' Side affirm that every employee has the right to work free from intimidation and harassment on the grounds of religious belief, political opinion, sex, pregnancy or maternity, gender reassignment, being married or in a civil partnership, race, disability, sexual orientation or age.

Action

This declaration will be prominently displayed in the school and made available to all staff and will be made available on the Education Authority website.

Despite this Joint Declaration of Protection being reaffirmed and reissued in 2023, education workers continue to be subjected to abuse and harassment on equality grounds, ranging from persistent, 'low level' bullying behaviour to systematic campaigns of abuse.

The Joint Declaration is neither displayed nor observed in the majority of schools and education workers continue to experience unacceptable and, at times extreme, harassment, intimidation and discrimination both within and from outside the school setting.

Congress, therefore, calls upon NIC-ICTU to support the education workers in a campaign to ensure that:

1. The Declaration is displayed in schools as agreed, and measures are taken to raise awareness of workers and school communities regarding its implications
2. Significant protections are introduced to the education sector, as exist in other sectors, promoting zero tolerance of abuse
3. Robust accountability measures are established and implemented at all levels to respond appropriately to such behaviour wherever and whenever it occurs.

CSP**7. Support for internationally educated health and social care staff**

Conference recognises that our health and social care system has a staffing crisis. Conference further recognises that internationally educated staff bring benefits to our HSC and to our communities, however we also recognise that it is not without challenges for the individuals.

When the HSC is seeking to actively recruit from overseas they should be complying with the Northern Ireland code of practice for the international recruitment of health and social care personnel.

However when internationally educated staff apply directly for a post it is not clear what support and guidance they should be provided with. Many managers incorrectly assume that no additional support is required and that can lead to a very unsettling and unfair experience for the staff member.

Conference therefore calls on the NIC-ICTU Health Committee to work with the health unions to ensure that all aspects of the code of practice are put into practice irrespective of how the internationally educated staff member applies for work.

Human Rights & Equality

B&DTC & GMB

8. Violence Against Women & Girls

Conference acknowledges with alarm that Northern Ireland is facing what has been described as an epidemic of violence against women and girls witnessing a rise in domestic violence and the highest levels of femicide in Europe. As of September 2024, there have been five women murdered this year and 23 women murdered in Northern Ireland since 2020.

Recent research commissioned by Executive Office, ('It just happens: girls and young women's views of violence in Northern Ireland' & 'Every Voice Matters') suggests 98% of women in Northern Ireland have experienced at least one form of violence or abuse in their lifetime, with half (50%) experiencing this before they were 11 years old. The research makes make clear that preventing violence against girls and women requires broad and systemic change - to attitudes, cultures, policies, institutions and laws.

VAWG highlights the oppression of women buttressed & enabled by sexist and misogynist ideology. This ideology is fuelled by extreme material on the internet & by misogynist 'influencers'. The recent and overdue launch of Stormont's strategy to tackle violence against women and girls is to be welcomed but we must be under no illusion regarding its limitations and the work that will need to be done to ensure its adequate implementation, not least in terms of proper resources.

Sexism and misogyny are still evident at the heart of this country. Shockingly it is tolerated and even promoted in the workplace. It manifests in the emotional,

psychological and financial abuse that is harder to prove but is prevalent.

Women don't just want to feel safe; we want to be safe. This means we need to raise our standards and expectations in the workplace to eliminate all forms of sexist behaviours, understand the impact, be up to date with new laws and require employers to provide training for all workers.

Changing this endemic culture will need the active input from all trade unions and civil society if we are to turn the tide on the misogyny sweeping our society.

With this in mind Conference resolves to:

- Work with affiliates to demand that employers deliver mandatory workshops and training in every workplace with a view to challenging and eradicating misogyny and sexist attitudes which result in and enable violence against women and girls. Such a programme should not be a one off but a renewed and regular engagement that drills home that there is no place for misogyny in the workplace.
- Affiliates should continue to campaign for robust policies to tackle sexual harassment and gender-based abuse within every place of employment. This is not the same as domestic violence policies, it is a stand-alone issue and those making such a claim and disclosure should be offered the same protections as contained in workplace whistle blowing policies. It is time that a zero-tolerance approach is taken and that those found guilty of such abuse should be dealt through charges of gross misconduct and removed from their positions.
- Conference also recognises that the £3 million allocated by Stormont is grossly insufficient and will not provide the critical mass or fundamental change required to provide a shift in attitudes.

- Reinforce that every part of the criminal justice system should be the first to be retrained and reprogrammed. It is past time for those in a position of power to take seriously their responsibility to exercise that power. It's past time to send a clear message to all those involved in violence against women and girls that they will face the full force of a legal system. This system must protect all those women and girls who are attacked, abused or murdered. It is now time for action.
- Ensure there is monitoring of the prevalence and nature of domestic violence and sexual harassment, including racialised forms of sexual harassment to which Black women are subjected.
- Demand a 'Statutory Code of Practice' (policy & procedures) for employers to prevent and respond to misogyny, sexual harassment and victimisation within the workplace including in the precarious job sector.
- Campaign against the effective decriminalisation of rape and ensure access to justice for all sexual and domestic violence survivors
- Campaign to ensure that migrant women can access the support, welfare systems, a safe place and legal tools they need to escape abuse, and can report violence without fear of immigration enforcement
- Campaign for fully funded support services, staffed by women, for women fleeing violence and domestic abuse
- Campaign for measures to *prevent* violence against women and girls, including resources and support for schools to address harmful sexual behaviour
- Campaign to eradicate the cultural, economic and social norms that are the root causes of violence against women and girls.

PCS

9. Equality legislation and pay gaps

Congress welcomes the recent consultations by the Northern Ireland Assembly on employment law and extends our thanks to NIC-ICTU for coordinating the responses of affiliated unions. We acknowledge the significant contributions made by trade unions during this process and express our hope that the demands put forward will be adequately reflected in the upcoming legislation.

However, it is essential that we continue to apply campaign pressure on politicians to ensure that these legislative changes truly benefit workers and vulnerable groups. Without sustained pressure, key issues may not be sufficiently addressed.

In particular, this conference highlights the following critical areas that require urgent action:

- **Age Discrimination in Goods, Facilities, and Services:** Northern Ireland remains without adequate protection against age discrimination in these areas, a glaring gap in our equality framework.
- **Disability and Gender Pay Gaps:** As highlighted in recent discussions and communications, the persistent disparities in pay for disabled individuals and women must be a legislative priority.
- **Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland:** The absence of a comprehensive Bill of Rights continues to weaken the protections available to our communities. We reiterate the necessity of introducing a robust Bill to ensure a fairer society.
- **Section 75:** The provisions under Section 75 must be strengthened to ensure that public authorities in Northern Ireland are fully committed to promoting equality and eliminating discrimination.

- **Single Equality Act:** Northern Ireland is in dire need of a Single Equality Act that surpasses the provisions of the GB Equality Act 2010. A harmonised and superior legal framework would provide stronger protections and create greater coherence across equality law.

Congress calls on the NIC-ICTU to maintain and escalate campaign efforts, ensuring that these issues remain at the forefront of political discussion and that the forthcoming legislation delivers real progress for workers and marginalised groups.

RWC (NIC-ICTU motion)

10. Age Discrimination

This BDC is very concerned to note that the Draft PfG produced by the NI Executive makes no mention of our older citizens or their needs.

Once again, they are left to feel undervalued and forgotten.

Neither does the legislation to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of age in the provision of goods, facilities and services appear in the Draft PfG. This is despite promises that it would be brought forward in 2016, 2021 and again in 2022.

The older generation in NI is once again left without the protection in law which their counterparts in other parts of the UK and the ROI enjoy.

This conference believes that age discrimination legislation in relation to goods, facilities and services must:

- Be framed with a strong purpose clause containing a series of clearly articulated goals.
- Include public, private and voluntary sector in its scope.
- Include strong protections for older people across all areas of goods,

facilities and services, in particular health and social care and financial services.

- Include people of all ages in the scope of the legislation.
- Learn from the experience of the pandemic not to marginalise our older citizens but to value their continued contribution to our society.

This conference calls on the incoming NIC-ICTU to work with other older peoples' organisations and campaign vigorously to bring this legislation to belated fruition so that older citizens may get justice

GMB & RCM

11. Neurodiversity Inclusion in the Workplace

- Conference notes the significant issues neurodivergent people have entering the workforce and the increased level of discrimination they face in the workplace. Currently there is emerging a "lost generation" of neurodivergent workers, who due to receiving a "late" diagnosis for their condition in adulthood have in many cases suffered significantly with their mental health as a result. There are a growing number of neurodivergent professionals, especially in healthcare but the true figures are unknown due to fear of discrimination and a lack of diagnosis. For example, we know many students with neurodivergent conditions would like to train to enter the NHS, including as midwives, but may be put off because they fear the course doesn't make allowances for their condition.
- The trade union movement must encourage people from a range of backgrounds, including neurodivergent people, into healthcare and other professions, making accommodations and improving the working conditions for neurodivergent workers will bring benefits to the entire workforce. Common issues such as excessive

noise, lack of natural light, poor communication etc. which maybe disabling for neurodivergent workers act as stressors on the rest of the workforce.

- Conference notes that many people are choosing to self-diagnose their neurodivergence (usually after extensive research) to provide answers for issues they face in their lives. Many of these people do this as a first step before going on to seek a formal diagnosis, but under the current legal framework in N. Ireland these people are provided no protection under discrimination or employment law.
- The trade union movement must support and encourage people from a range of backgrounds into the workplace with particular consideration to the positive contribution neurodiversity can bring. The trade union movement needs to make its voice heard on this burning issue.
- Conference notes positively that increasing numbers of neurodivergent people are receiving diagnosis, being provided with support, and entering the workforce. However, much more needs to be done.
- This conference affirms the social model of disability, notes the unhealthy situation of legal protections in N. Ireland for neurodivergent workers and demands the reform of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 considering the current "Late" diagnosis crisis.
- Conference demands further investment in healthcare and trade union education that supports and widens acceptance of neurodivergent individuals in the workforce.
- Conference demands that adult psychiatric diagnostic waiting times should be reduced, and other support services should be improved alongside ICTU developing an awareness programme for employers on this issue.
- ICTU should campaign for mandatory neurodiversity awareness training for all NHS staff as part of their mandatory EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) training.

UNISON

12. Dealing with the legacy of the past

Conference notes the commitment made by the new UK Government to repeal and replace the Legacy Act as called for by ICTU and our allies.

Conference recalls the support ICTU has given over many years to the campaign for a public inquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane. Conference welcomes the decision by the new UK Government to establish an independent statutory public inquiry and believes a fully human rights compliant public inquiry must take place as soon as possible.

In addition, Conference further calls on the UK Government to recommence the inquests, repeal and replace the Tory legislation as a matter of urgency and reconsider the establishment of the Commission set up by the previous Government.

Conference calls on the Northern Ireland Committee to continue working alongside victims and survivors' groups, and our allies across civic society, to engage with the new UK Government to implement measures within the Stormont House Agreement in a human rights compliant manner.

Workers Rights

NIC-ICTU

13. Good Jobs Employment Bill

Conference welcomes the beginning of the legislative process in the NI Assembly for a the 'Good Jobs' NI Employment Bill. This far-reaching and comprehensive legislation will, when enacted, deliver the most progressive package of workers' rights in decades, fully utilising the devolution settlement of 1998 which mandates the



MLAs elected by the people of Northern Ireland to improve employment law for everyone's benefit.

The proposals in the consultation from the Department for the Economy and outlined further in the NIC-ICTU policy document 'The Good Employment Plan' are for the benefit of the whole economy, promising better work leading to better industrial relations, improved terms & conditions and onto better productivity.

This promising development is the result of years of research, of lobbying political leaders and civil society, of industrial action for just outcomes and of a widespread recognition that the ideology which suppressed wages and workers' rights for decades has resulted in profound social inequality reflected in workplaces that serve neither workers, service users or customers.

This movement is united in focusing its lobbying efforts over the remaining mandate of the NI Assembly elected in 2022 to fulfilling the promise of this vision. We are determined to leave a legacy which will be of benefit for people working now and for those who are yet to begin their working lives.

These are our ideal outcomes. They are all achievable:

- Collective bargaining in workplace and across sectors;
- Access for workers to join trade unions;
- A right of access for a trade union representative to access a workplace and engage with the workers;
- Simplification of the process of have a trade union recognised;
- Protections for Trade Union Representatives;
- Statutory rights for trade union equalities representatives;
- Electronic ballots for union elections and industrial action;

- The right to take official industrial action free from the fear of dismissal or victimisation;
- A single employment status category of 'worker';
- Day 1 employment rights and protections;
- A right to seek flexible working arrangements;
- Replacing zero-hours contracts with guaranteed contractual hours per week;
- Clearer employment contracts and itemised payslips;
- Public Procurement to Improve Employment Models;
- Ending Fire-and-Rehire;
- Reform of Employment Tribunals;
- Better Enforcement of Employment Rights;
- A Comprehensive Review of Work-Life Balance Measures;
- Strengthened flexible leave entitlements as well as access to family leaves;
- A Right to 'disconnect' - to not perform work outside agreed working hours.

Conference endorses the contents of 'The Good Employment Plan' and affirms its intention to ensure the delivery of the full potential of this legislation.

FSU

14. Employment legislation

Conference notes the general shift in trade unions towards organising, meaning both the strengthening of our existing structures and also the recruitment of new members in traditional and new sectors.

Conference agrees that legislative changes are necessary in Northern Ireland to assist this shift and to neutralise both union avoidance and union busting tactics by employers designed to ignore, isolate and weaken trade unions.

Conference welcomes the Employment Bill consultation process now opened by the Minister for the Economy, Conor Murphy and his commitment to 'good jobs' recognising trade unions as a key element of good jobs.

FSU calls on conference to work with and support ICTU in its work on this new Employment Bill especially prioritising those elements of which will make it easier for workers to access and join trade unions, provide greater facilities and protections for shop stewards, disincentives on union busting and simplification of the collective bargaining and recognition process.

USDRAW

15. Abuse is not part of the job

Conference notes the commitment from the new Westminster Government to introduce, in England and Wales, a specific offence of assaulting a retail worker. This follows on from the introduction of similar legislation in Scotland in August 2021.

Although this is a positive development in the campaign to protect retail workers, Conference is disappointed that retail workers in Northern Ireland are not covered by specific legal protections. This is despite the fact that retail crime has soared across Northern Ireland, the same age verification checks are required in NI retail outlets as elsewhere, and retail workers in Northern Ireland continue to play an essential role in our economy and society.

Conference firmly believes that all retail workers deserve legal protection from abuse, threats and violence. Effective legislation must be passed in Northern Ireland to protect retail workers and make it clear abuse is not part of the job.

Conference calls on the Northern Ireland ICTU to:

- i. Publicly support Usdaw's 'Freedom From Fear' Campaign.
- ii. Lobby the Northern Ireland Executive to bring forward a Bill, based on the provisions already passed in Scotland, to give retail workers the protection they deserve.
- iii. Make the case to employers to protect retail workers and enforce zero tolerance policies in stores.

Equity

16. Ban upfront fees charged to performers by casting directories

Conference:

- i. notes that, while the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations 2003 prohibits charging upfront fees to work-seekers in most industries, the performing arts and entertainment industries are exempt from this ban:
- ii. recognises that performers and creative workers – and not engagers, casting directors or agents – pay significant fees, often in excess of £180 per year, for their inclusion in a casting directory, regardless of whether or not they obtain work; and
- iii. notes that, during a cost-of-living crisis, this cost places a significant burden on workers in an industry already characterised by insecure work and unpredictable income.

Conference calls, therefore, on the Irish Congress of Trades Union to:

- a. support the repeal of this unfair exemption for the performing arts and entertainment industries and call for such casting directory fees to be borne by producers, not workers

- b. lobby the Stormont and Westminster governments to bring forward legislation to remove the exemption.

Equity

17. Pay Promptly!

Freelance workers are usually paid by a variety of different employers, all with their own different payment systems and schedules. This can lead to workers encountering serious cash-flow issues as payments are too often far from prompt.

Trade Unions are regularly engaged in negotiations over fair rates of pay for work carried out, but the length of time a worker takes to be paid is directly in the hands of the employers making the payment.

There is a theoretical rule over a 30 day maximum wait for invoices to be paid, but this is often breached. Workers can include interest/compensation charges on their invoices but again these are often ignored by employers and many workers don't have the capacity to chase these late fees, often grateful to have been paid their fee even if it is late.

Conference calls on ICTU to create a campaign which demands prompt payment to workers. In most cases the employers have the funds available to pay and the worker is not in a position to wait. It is a matter of respect and to many freelancers can mean the difference between bills being paid or payments bouncing.

RCM

18. Flexible affordable childcare

Maternity services are a 24/7 365 day essential element of healthcare that requires the majority of the workforce to be flexible, available, and able to provide regular periods of on-call and respond to emergencies and unplanned care.

Approximately 70% of Midwives work part time and 99.8% of the workforce are women. In Northern Ireland the age profile of midwives is shifting, the number of midwives under the age of 30 has increased substantially with a corresponding increase in the number in their early thirties thanks to increased investment in student numbers. This trend should be welcomed.

However the turnover of midwives continues to raise concerns and the retention and recruitment of midwives is becoming recurring risk across. These risks are adversely impacting on the ability of maternity services to ensure safe and appropriate staffing. One of the key reasons midwives have given for leaving their posts and profession or reducing their hours by requesting part time working, is to reduce costs and improve their ability to access childcare. Many rely on extended family and friends, however the demographics of society have shifted further over the last few decades, meaning this is far less likely to be a viable option for many.

Childcare providers are not always available within tangible distances and their operating hours are in the main restricted to weekday and day hours. Additionally, the costs often consume a significant percentage of wages with Midwives who often have to pay for regular sessions that they cannot use rather than those that meet their shift requirements.

The RCM calls on conference to campaign for increased access and reduced or supported costs for safe and flexible childcare, to enable families to contribute to the maternity and wider healthcare workforce without being forced to live in borderline poverty or give up their profession.

RMT

19. Strengthen Seafarer Employment Rights

Congress is concerned that P&O Ferries have still not been punished for their unlawful assault on seafarer jobs, including on the Cairnryan-Larne route, where employment agencies now supply all the labour to P&O Ferries and where seafarers could still be required to work for 17 week tours which cause fatigue and are completely unacceptable in a modern short sea ferry service.

Congress therefore welcomes the commitment of the new Labour Government to seek to prevent another P&O ferry scandal by introducing a mandatory Seafarers Employment Charter applicable on short sea international ferry routes. Whilst the final legislation and content of the Charter is, at the time of writing, still subject to discussion with the government, the principle of the Charter is that it would seek to prevent undercutting and a further race to the bottom by mandating minimum employment protections for seafarers.

Congress further notes that the French Government has already introduced legislation similar to a mandatory charter in response to the P&O Ferries scandal, capping seafarer roster patterns in the Channel at a maximum of two weeks and extending domestic employment rights, including the right to a decent pension for seafarers on international ferry services between the UK and France.

Congress supports a strong set of mandatory employment conditions for seafarers on all ferry services and asks that ICTU works with maritime affiliates to lobby relevant politicians in Northern Ireland to introduce the strongest possible Mandatory Charter for employment protections for all seafarers, including those working on

economically vital ferry links between ports in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

FSU

20. Gender Pay Gap

Conference acknowledges that there is currently no requirement for firms in Northern Ireland to publish their gender pay gap.

Conference agrees that legislation introduced in the Republic of Ireland compelling companies of a certain size to publish their gender pay gap and produce an action plan to rectify any deficiencies has brought an added expectation on companies to act in a way that will close the gender pay gap.

This Financial Services Union calls on conference to campaign for the effective legislation of the Employment Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, in particular section 19 which provides for gender pay regulation to the introduced in Northern Ireland.

FSU further call on conference to ensure that the following is including in any proposed legislation/regulation

- Make pay ranges public for workers to see and end pay secrecy
- Make employers agree annual reduction targets through actions agreed with Trade Unions.
- Encourage part-time and flexible working arrangement for staff at all levels of the Company
- Audit pay increase and performance ratings each year for fairness and equality
- Ensure that collective bargaining is a right of all workers

Economy & public services

UNISON

21. Fair Funding and addressing priorities in a Programme for Government

Conference notes that 2024 saw a return of devolved power-sharing Government at Stormont. Conference commends the huge effort of our collective membership across the public and private sector in Northern Ireland in taking sustained industrial action for pay justice in the absence of devolved Government.

Conference agrees that with devolved Government restored, it must now deliver for our members, their families and their communities. However, Conference recalls the major cuts to public services imposed in Northern Ireland by the previous UK Government in the absence of the institutions at Stormont. Conference is very concerned that despite the return of devolved Government in Northern Ireland, and the election of a new UK Government, this funding crisis in our public services is continuing.

Whilst noting the recent adjustment to the Barnett Formula, which will provide some additional funding for Northern Ireland on the basis of need, Conference agrees that the new UK Government must ensure that sufficient, sustained funding is available for public services in Northern Ireland.

Conference calls on the Northern Ireland Committee, working alongside affiliates, to continue to campaign for the funding settlements our public services require, seeking that the Executive secure a sustained, needs-based funding settlement as a priority.

Conference calls on the Northern Ireland Committee to coordinate a comprehensive

programme of engagement across the Executive, further to the Executive's new Programme for Government, engaging across all Executive Departments in seeking commitments to take action on the priority issues. This should include:

- Delivery of a new model of public health, delivered on NHS founding principles, which has eradicating health inequalities as its central goal;
- The prioritisation of proper workforce planning across health and social care, including through the passing of proposed legislation on Safe and Effective Staffing;
- Reform of the adult social care system, meeting rising levels of need through increased public sector provision and supporting delivery of decent pay and terms and conditions through the Social Care Fair Work Forum;
- The introduction of universal, nutritious, free school meals;
- Urgently delivering a comprehensive, effective Anti-Poverty Strategy based on objective need, in addition to the other outstanding social inclusion strategies on gender equality, sexual orientation and disability, and an updated Racial Equality Strategy;
- Passing comprehensive, effective legislation to strengthen worker and trade union rights, further to proposals for a 'Good Jobs' Employment Rights Bill;
- Delivery of a Childcare Strategy that provides for affordable, accessible childcare and which recognises and values the workforce;
- Support for the community and voluntary sector which ensures better pay, terms and conditions and job security for the workforce.
- Commitment to the principles of the Just Transition in the move to a low carbon economy, based on social dialogue between Government,

employers and unions, including through trade union representation on a new Just Transition commission.

Conference reaffirms its support for the implementation of the commitments made within the peace agreements on equality and human rights and calls on the new Executive to function within a rights-based framework.

DTUC

22. Regional Disparities

It is now well established that Derry and the North West region has for too long been starved of the resources, investment and the political will necessary to repair the impact of a century of under-development.

Among the many adverse effects of the chronic lack of investment are the highest rates of child poverty and average wage levels that are £3,000 to £5,000 less than the average wage across the North.

Many of the private sector job opportunities that do exist are low paid with poor working conditions, forcing our young educated talent to leave in search of a decent future.

While the recent commitments on tackling regional disparity are to be welcomed, they are long on aspiration and very short on delivery commitment. Therefore conference calls on the NI Committee to work with ICTU across the island to:

Campaign and lobby the Stormont Executive and the Dublin government to develop a comprehensive, fully funded regional development plan for the North West of the island to include:

- expansion of Magee to 15,000 students by 2030;
- incentives to attract students to Derry

until 2030, including reduced cost of accommodation;

- an urgent programme of mass social and affordable house-building in response to chronic housing scarcity in Derry and the North West where the housing crisis is exacerbated by defective cement blocks;
- improved public transport links into the city from across the North, in particular a half-hourly train service to Belfast, such as that enjoyed by Cullybackey or Ballymena, and the urgent prioritisation of proposals contained in the All Ireland Strategic Rail Review to extend and develop the North West rail network.

FSU

23. Bank branches and bank hubs

Conference notes the continuing closure of bank branches in Northern Ireland and deplores the withdrawal of local banking services in communities across Northern Ireland.

Conference notes the importance of banking services delivered at a local level

Conference further notes with concern the emergence of banking hubs in Northern Ireland.

Conference agrees that banking hubs are not a direct replacement for traditional bank branches.

Conference further notes the results of polling undertaken by polling company Ireland thinks in partnership with Lucid Thinks which found that:

- 77% of people feel local bank branch with face-to-face customer service to your local area is either very important or important.
- 87% support a commitment from Banks to maintain current bank branch levels for a period of five years.

Conference calls on ICTU NI to campaign with the FSU seeking the Minister for Finance to seek from the banks a moratorium on branch closures for a period of five years in Northern Ireland.

CCTU

24. Just Transition

Conference recognises the importance of meeting the Paris Agreement Net Zero targets and notes that both our public and private sectors have not taken sufficient action to meet these targets.

Conference also notes the impact of climate on our natural environment with the ongoing pollution of our rivers and streams, especially the impact of pollution in Lough Neagh, our primary source of drinking water. Conference calls for affiliates to support the work of and affiliate to climate action groups such as Save Lough Neagh and The Rivers Trust.

Conference also welcomes the work in establishing a Just Transition Commission and Climate Commissioner but remains concerned that the delay in taking these actions makes changing the impact of climate change ever more difficult.

Conference calls on Congress to increase its engagement with DAERA and The Executive Office on these issues to ensure worker representation and to engage all Stormont Ministers prioritise work on a Just Transition within their areas of responsibility.

Conference also calls on NI Committee to establish a formal Climate Committee that will bring trade union climate activists together to drive forward work on Just Transition and increase awareness and activism on this issue.

Equity

25. Safe Home Supporting the Night-Time Economy

Performing artists such as cabaret artistes, comedians, stage management and singers can be vulnerable when working at entertainment venues, especially when working alone. Their work can include leaving venues late at night, parking and loading out in insecure locations with expensive and/or cumbersome equipment and a lack of personal security. Safety can be a particular concern in areas of Northern Ireland that are more remote or have poor public transport links.

Equity's Safe Home campaign calls on venues in Northern Ireland to safeguard performing artists who work at night or in vulnerable locations here, including a commitment to accompany artists to their ongoing transport and to confirm payment for travel in contracts.

This issue extends to those working in the night-time economy who need public transport provision which is safe, extensive and affordable so they can have the best opportunities to work and earn. This in turn will support the growth of the night-time economy. Equity supports the provision of safe, public transport in the later hours, enabling workers to not only get home safe whether in their own towns and cities but also between towns and cities, later into the evening.

Conference calls, therefore, on the Irish Congress of Trades Union to lobby for safe, extensive and later night public transport links to be provided throughout Northern Ireland so workers can get home safe whilst contributing to the growth of the night time economy.

FBU**26. Renew our fire and rescue service.**

The Fire & Rescue Service provides a life-saving resource to all communities across Northern Ireland. Like all other public sector bodies the Fire and Rescue Service has suffered throughout the last 14 years of Austerity

The Fire Brigades Union's (FBU) Firefighters' Manifesto sets out a clear list of demands on the government to renew our fire and rescue service.

These demands are:

1. Investment: stop and reverse the cuts to jobs
2. Fair pay: delivered through collective bargaining
3. National standards: on response times and crewing
4. A voice for firefighters: a new forum to set policy and standards
5. Climate action: a service fit for floods and extreme weather events
6. Democratic public service: accountable to our communities
7. Equality: an inclusive service, open to everyone
8. Decon: health monitoring and recognition of occupational disease
9. The right to strike: scrap the anti-union laws
10. Occupational pensions: recognising the realities of firefighting

The FBU calls on all affiliates and Congress to support our Campaign to ensure a fit for purpose Fire and Rescue Service for firefighters and the public alike.

FCTU**27. Universal Postal Service**

That this conference recognises that pensioners, especially those without email or internet access, are particularly dependent on the postal service for the receipt of communications from statutory organisations, including Health and Social Care (NHS) and from family and friends.

They are therefore at particular risk from social exclusion and isolation if this vital public service is reduced and compromised on the altar of capitalist profit.

Conference reiterates its position demanding the re-nationalisation of Royal Mail in the interest of our communities, society and the wider economy. Conference expresses its concern that under the current private-for-profit management, employees report being instructed to prioritise delivery of tracked parcels and packets over first and second letter leading to a deterioration in the delivery of letters including those for medical appointments.

Conference instructs the incoming Northern Ireland Committee to launch a campaign demanding that the Stormont Assembly legislate to ensure, that regardless of ownership, the Royal Mail's universal service obligation guaranteeing deliveries to all UK addresses on a six-day week basis be kept and enforced in this region.

NIPSA**28. Social Housing**

The number of racial hate and intimidatory incidents has reached an all-time high in NI since August with anti-immigration protests descending into senseless violence. The trade union movement has stood in solidarity with migrant workers and asylum seekers to condemn these despicable



actions by the minority of far-right mobs who attempt to justify their misplaced anger by peddling the myth that it is immigration that has caused the housing crises in both the north and south of Ireland. But the stark reality is that the housing crises are the result of decades of underfunding by both Governments due to a deliberate failure to recognise the fundamental human right of everyone in society, regardless of race or religion, to have a safe and secure roof over their heads to call home. Whilst it is welcomed that the NI Executive has, after 26 years in power, placed public and social housing as one of the 9 key pillars of the draft Programme for Government currently out for public consultation, the continuing failure to provide a housing budget based upon need for the NI Housing Executive to enable it to deliver its housing statutory and contractual obligations across NI means that the vision for the future cannot be realised without a fundamental rethink and significant increase to public funding.

The Department for Communities' EQIA of its indicative budget for the NIHE makes very clear that Government funding falls well short of what is required to meet the demands of those in housing crisis, the numbers of which have escalated by over 1000% within the past 5 years. Key services such as prevention of homelessness, provision of emergency temporary accommodation, housing maintenance and the Supporting People wraparound services to ensure that people are not trapped in a vicious cycle of homelessness, which has led to deaths on our streets, will have suffered dramatically by October of this year if funding is not greatly increased. The migrant workers who continue to be the target of racist hate crimes and spurious attacks every week across NI are also amongst those most vulnerable in our society to be negatively impacted by a budget which is not based upon need. Analysis of the EQIA exposes that it is people with virtually every protected characteristic in society who suffer the

impact of the NI housing crisis – it is migrant workers, asylum seekers, refugees, older people, families, children, single parents, young people leaving care and people with disabilities. The indicative funding allocation for social housing is having an adverse impact upon those already experiencing housing need and housing inequality, those living in fuel poverty and energy inefficient housing and those who require housing support services to live independently. Any deficit in funding equates to a reduction in the NIHE's ability to address the housing inequalities as well as health, social and economic inequalities that exist here and detriment the everyday lives of our people. Funding to build 2,500 new social homes instead of the projected 400 which the budget provides for would make a huge impact upon the lives of all those who desperately need help out of housing crisis.

In May 2022, NIPSA published its fourth policy document on the future of public housing in NI entitled the "Spectre of Privatisation". This collaborative publication sets out case studies across the UK and beyond of what Governments continue to do wrong in their approach to public housing and makes 8 recommendations of what can and should be done to help everyone in housing crisis. This includes the recommendation that the ONS classification of the NIHE should be changed by Treasury to allow it to publicly borrow to build new social housing such as Councils in GB can currently avail of.

Conference calls for the adoption of the recommendations contained within the Spectre of Privatisation Report as NIC-ICTU Policy and also calls for the NI Executive to ensure that the NIHE has access to a funding package based upon need so that it can maintain and grow all the housing services so badly needed to help those most vulnerable in our society.



B&DTC**29. Housing**

It is well recognised that the failings in policy and delivery of housing over decades in this state has left considerable numbers of people in our society struggling to access decent public and affordable housing and a secure future that this allows for families. This situation is only getting worse. Moreover, pressure on housing in some urban centres is presented, opportunistically by some as a contributory factor in recent abhorrent intimidation of immigrant families in Belfast and elsewhere.

Belfast & District Trades Union Council condemns these racist attacks and associated social conflict against vulnerable newcomers, and as part of a co-ordinated, focused and energetic plan to promote a more equitable society we call on the Stormont Executive to urgently expand and re-prioritise its Housing Policy within the draft Programme for Government. Specifically, we call on Ministers to:

- Draft a Policy with a clear orientation toward improving socially oriented housing provision;
- Make the necessary changes in the governance and finance structures in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) to enable it to borrow against its assets to kickstart a massive public housing building and upgrade programme, thereby creating thousands of construction jobs and hundreds of apprenticeships.
- Undertake a review of the structures required for public housing provision, with a view to creating the conditions to establish more democratic and accountable structures through the development of local municipalism to work alongside the NIHE in transforming the delivery of public and affordable housing and the rights of tenants within it.

- In addition to the provision of decent public housing, expand the range of housing type and tenancy structures to accommodate demographic change
- Ensure that not only the provision of housing on the basis of need continues but that its operation is fully protected and enforced by the relevant authorities at the point of delivery so that society's needs, not paramilitary intimidation, determines our current and future housing provision.

This BDC agrees that the deliberate policy over many decades to create and maintain a dominance of market-driven forces in housing provision has clearly failed those most in need in our society. Unshackling the Housing Executive to allow it to borrow to build and maintain current housing stock, alongside a significant redistribution of resources towards delivery of social housing is long overdue.

UNITE**30. Housing For All**

Conference recognises the longstanding failure of government in Northern Ireland to invest to build public housing to meet rising social demand. The absence of new public housing alongside measures to sell off existing social housing provision has resulted in a sharp increase in the numbers homeless and on the social housing waiting list; it has also enabled the rise of exploitation of tenants by landlords in the growing private rental market.

The resulting housing crisis has also been cynically exploited by far-right forces who have sought to divert the blame away from the political parties responsible onto minority and migrant-worker communities.

A generation is entering the labour market today who face a prospect of lifelong exploitation by rack-renting private sector

landlords. Only a small proportion will be able to buy their own homes and there is little to no chance of getting low-rent public housing. For many the options are couch-surfing, living with parents or staying with friends, offering no hopes for young people to achieve independent living or the possibility of setting up a home for themselves.

The social housing waiting list currently stands at almost 48,000 households, of whom more than 36,000 are deemed to be in housing stress. In 2021, the Department of Communities published a draft 15-year housing supply strategy which set out a goal of 100,000 new houses but only one third of these were to be social or 'affordable' housing. But even that target was too ambitious. In the next three years only 2,852 social housing units were completed and the rate of building is set to fall precipitously by 70% in the current year to only 500 as a result of the severe cuts imposed under the Finance Minister's recent budget.

Instead of investing in an ambitious strategy to build new public housing, Stormont housing policy is now explicitly reliant on encouraging private property speculators to build what has been relabelled 'affordable' housing. The NIHE's functions to build and improve public housing has been increasing outsourced.

Conference mandates the incoming Northern Ireland Executive to work with affiliates to launch a campaign demanding the Stormont Executive adopts a twin-track approach to address the housing crisis. For public investment to allow the Housing Executive to build the public housing needed, with functions and services in-sourced from the private sector. And the introduction of rent caps and tenants-rights legislation to end the exploitation by rack-renting landlords.

PCS

31. Opposing Privatisation and Campaigning for In-Housing in the Public Sector

Congress recognises the ongoing damage caused by privatisation across the public sector. Privatised services have consistently resulted in poorer pay, terms, and conditions for workers, while failing to deliver the quality and efficiency promised. We have seen this in numerous outsourced contracts where staff are forced to accept inferior employment conditions, including reduced wages, less job security, and weaker pension provisions.

In particular, we note the DWP G4S campaign pursued by PCS and GMB, which highlights the exploitation and poor treatment of workers contracted to provide essential public services. This case is emblematic of the broader issues within privatised public sector workforces.

In response to these challenges, this conference calls for:

- **Comprehensive In-Housing Campaigns:** We demand that public services be brought back in-house, where workers can be directly employed by the public sector with fair pay and improved working conditions. In-housing will ensure accountability, better service delivery, and a workforce that is treated with dignity.

Furthermore, it is essential for unions to strengthen their collaborative efforts to tackle the exploitative practices of large private contractors. This conference calls for:

- **Increased Union Cooperation:** We urge all unions to work together, sharing intelligence and coordinating strategies to organise and bargain more effectively with major outsourcing companies,

such as G4S, MITIE, OCS, Atalian Servest, and others. By pooling resources and knowledge, we can increase our leverage and secure stronger protections and fair treatment for workers across the sector.

Strong, determined and proactive action can build the momentum needed to bring outsourced services back under public control and create a stronger, fairer future for all public sector workers.

CWU & UNITE

32. Winter fuel payments

Conference condemns the recent decision by the UK government to end the universal entitlement to winter fuel payments, a decision that was enforced in Northern Ireland by the Stormont Executive parties.

The policy will limit the special fuel payment to the ten percent of pensioners who are eligible for the receipt of pension credit and exclude pensioner with any significant level of employment-based private or public pension. This measure therefore disproportionately impacts retired workers who were employed in low-wage positions – many of whom already experience severe hardship.

Conference notes that the incomes of pensioners are fixed and they have no mechanism to make up this loss. Furthermore due to the region's climate and our low-income status, this regressive policy will disproportionately impact Northern Ireland which has the highest fuel poverty rate (24%) in the UK. More pensioners in Northern Ireland will struggle to either 'heat or eat' themselves this winter than any other part of the UK.

Across the UK, this policy has been opposed by trades unions and allies supporting older people such as the National Pensioners'

Convention. They point out that 10 million UK pensioners will lose up to £300 a year. This is equivalent to losing more than a week's pension income, and the cuts come just as Ofgem has announced the energy price cap will increase by £149 this winter.

Pensioners shouldn't be made to pay the price for government mistakes. There is plenty of wealth in our society which the government could tax. The energy companies more than trebled their profits during the pandemic and the 50 richest families in Britain own a combined £500 billion in wealth - the same as half the UK population. A wealth tax on the richest 1% would raise billions, yet this Labour Government has chosen to target pensioners, the most vulnerable in society, instead.

Conference calls for a unified campaign to lobby our elected representatives both in Stormont and Westminster to lobby this Labour Govt to "change their minds" and reverse the introduction of means-testing for the Winter Fuel Allowance.

UNITE & GMB

33. Industrial policy for jobs and a future

Conference calls for Stormont to adopt an active industry policy for shipbuilding and aerospace sectors

As part of Boeing's acquisition of Spirit Aerosystems, Airbus will buy the formerly Shorts operations in Northern Ireland in its own supply chain; however, this provides no security to the approximately 2,500 employed in the remainder of production here. There is a real risk that splitting operations will result in significant job losses. Furthermore, the division of production will impact economies of scale and the integrated nature of operations and raise a longer-term threat to production.



Likewise, the recent financial crisis at Harland and Wolff threatens the livelihoods of 650 employees and 179 apprentices in the shipyard. Despite winning the £1.6 billion Fleet Solid Support Ship contract, the parent company entered administration and Unite the union and GMB are calling for direct government intervention which must secure continuity of employment for the entire workforce in the event that a reputable buyer with credible Shipbuilding credentials has not come forward.

Conference recognises that the absence of an active and interventionist industry policy by Stormont leaves shipbuilding and aerospace workers exposed to the contingencies of private equity companies and the prerogatives of profit. The failure to bring forward investment and to develop the industrial skills base means opportunities for growth through diversifying into socially-beneficial production in maritime shipbuilding, aerospace or the renewable energy sectors are being missed.

Conference calls on the Northern Ireland Executive to bring forward an active industrial policy, in particular for the threatened aerospace and shipbuilding sectors. Stormont must back the unions' campaigns for job security, continuity of employment, investment in industrial skills – and a future for our heavy industry sectors – and publicly demand the transfer of all Spirit (Shorts) production to a single operator and the transfer of Harland & Wolff to a credible new owner as a going concern.

Health

PDA

34. Lack of inclusion is active exclusion

Congress notes that more than 95% of people in Northern Ireland live less than one mile from a community pharmacy. Congress notes that this level of accessibility did not drop throughout hardships of recent years. We note the annual estimated spend on GP prescribed medicines in Northern Ireland is £444Million, equating to 43 million prescription items. Congress also notes that pharmacists are found providing vital pharmaceutical care in hospital trust settings, as well as close to peoples' homes.

Very soon, adding another string to the profession's bow, pharmacists will graduate already qualified to independently prescribe medicines.

Yet pharmacists remain, in many ways, an outlier within in the healthcare workforce. Pharmacists often practice alone, with limited opportunity to collectivise, and as a result become more and more isolated from both intra and inter professional colleagues. Outside of those who are employed directly under the terms of Agenda for Change, there is no framework linked to pay for career progression. Not only is there is wild variation in employment practice across settings and sectors, but there is also variation between employers in the same sector.

Now, more than ever, we know the health service is broken and needs reform. Pharmacists as the experts in medicines with the potential to improve health at population level through pharmaceutical care, can no longer be outliers when service development and workforce strategy are being developed. They cannot be excluded from discussions on

changes made that will affect their everyday working lives. This is crucial to retain the strength of the profession. Changes have already been made to the future vision of their professional roles, without their consultation.

Changes such as:

- Pharmacists being called upon to provide enhanced supervision and mentoring of Foundation Year Trainee pharmacists, yet this commitment and time requirement has not been consented to by pharmacists already practicing at maximum capacity. Union members have reported attempts to amend their contract by stealth to add this responsibility, rather than consultation.
- Prescribing pharmacists currently risk practicing under the expectation that they can simultaneously maintain core dispensing while prescribing in community pharmacies. Calls to introduce a two-plus pharmacist model have been thus far ignored, so pharmacists, in the interest of maintaining services, endanger their own wellbeing, presenting a potential risk to patient safety.
- Those working in GP practices are subject to pay increases decided by GP employers – who have at times sought to apply pay rises non-uniformly, by bypassing negotiation with the recognised trade union, and ignoring the simple principle that equal work deserves equal reward.

This is unacceptable and the interests of these workers must be protected. All parties who utilise pharmacists' role in service delivery, or directly employ them, MUST seek to consult with not only the perspective of senior pharmacists in the trusts with managerial responsibilities, not only the pharmacy business owners, not only the employing GPs, but with front-line

working pharmacists themselves, through their trade union – the PDA. There can be no excuse to be complicit in pharmacist exclusion.

Failure to include is to exclude.

Congress supports PDA Union's campaigns to make this no more.

CSP

35. Health Inequalities

Health inequalities requires cross department support but also requires the department to work with trade unions

In 2013 the department for health published Making life better a strategic framework for public health. This was a ten-year strategy so it technically ended in 2023.

In his first speech to the house after taking office as minister for health Mr Nesbitt identified health inequalities as a prime area of focus. In July this year the minister announced the first phase of a live better initiative which is designed to bring targeted support to communities which need it most.

He talked of the community and voluntary sector being key but failed to mention the importance of trade unions in helping to deliver this initiative.

We agree with the minister that public health and reducing health inequalities is wider than just the health service, but we feel that unions have a vital and much ignored role to play in supporting and driving this agenda.

We therefore call on the NIC-ICTU Health Committee and the Executive Committee of NIC-ICTU to use all avenues open to them to encourage the re-establishment of the health partnership forum. This forum should play a key role in developing

and supporting ways to reduce health inequalities and improve the public health.

We also urge all unions to consider how in their communication with members they can continue to spread messages around health improvement – encouraging and supporting members to take part in health screening and vaccination and looking at the opportunities they have as a unions to provide nutritional advice and to encourage activity. We would like to see the ICTU conference brochure include helpful advice such as stretches or local walking routes to combat the amount of time delegates spend sitting.

SIPTU

36. NHS Waiting Lists

This motion calls on ICTU to lead an active campaign to highlight and address the devastating social and economic impact of NHS waiting lists on working people and their families in Northern Ireland.

The NI health service's current "critical situation" comes after almost a decade of worsening waiting lists for elective care.

The number of patients on waiting lists for medical care and surgery appointments currently equates to more than a quarter of the population of Northern Ireland.

The NI Audit Office has stated that: "Waiting list performance levels are significantly worse in Northern Ireland compared with the other UK regions."

SIPTU NIDC calls on ICTU to launch a campaign strategy calling for an end to the two-tier healthcare system in the north, for increased north-south cooperation between health and medical services across the island and for the allocation of urgent funding from the UK Government to both clear patient backlogs and drive longer-term health and social care transformation.

SIPTU

37. Adequate Sick Pay Provision

Conference believes that the coronavirus crisis highlighted the need for the protection of workers income and health through the provision of adequate sick pay provision.

In Northern Ireland Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) has been in existence since 1983. However, Covid-19 exposed the derisory and inadequate nature of this benefit to workers and their families. Paid at £116.75 per week it represents less than 20% of average earnings (£641) in Northern Ireland.

This is in stark contrast to other European states who pay between 70%-100% of gross wages when workers become unwell and need to recuperate. This makes the UK Statutory Sick Pay scheme the least generous in Europe.

Furthermore, not all workers can avail of the benefit, with a Lower Earnings Limit (LEL) of £123 applied before entitlement to SSP. This has left vast swathes of the lowest paid effectively excluded from any form of income protection when they become ill. A recent TUC study revealed that 1.3million do not earn enough to qualify for statutory sick pay with 70% being women.

It is estimated that one-third of zero-hour contract workers are not covered and a staggering 10million workers in the UK with sick pay that is either too low to meet basic living costs, or no sick pay at all. The same TUC Report highlighted that a zero-hour worker are 8 times more likely than those on secure contracts to miss out on SSP.

As expected, existing inequalities on gender and race are accentuated, with these groups of workers overrepresented in falling through the cracks of provision.

It is therefore welcomed that the UK Government in the Kings Speech have gave

a commitment that waiting days, and the lower earnings threshold will be scrapped.

Abolishing waiting days will directly benefit those most exposed to exploitative employment practices and provide real income protection at the time when workers need it the most.

However, the proposed reforms do not go far enough. The provision of sick pay in the UK is the worst among comparator OECD countries, with income dropping on average by over 80% when workers become unwell!

We believe that SSP should increase from the derisory £116.75 per week and be benchmarked against the Real Living Wage (RLW) at minimum. This would uprate sick pay provision to £444 per week which reflects the equivalent of a week's pay at the RLW currently £12.00.

This should not be our final destination for sick pay provision but the starting point for a serious discussion on how we emulate European nations which more often than not provide sick provision based on average earnings.

The lessons of the pandemic seem to have passed by those in Government and we must ensure that workers and their families are adequately protected now and into the future from the scourge of low pay when they are ill.

We call on Conference to endorse the following:

- Increase statutory sick pay provision to £444 per week to represent the equivalent of a week's pay at the Real Living Wage.
- Remove the waiting period currently in operation and replace with payment on the first day of absence. Universal coverage for all workers.

- Abolish the earnings threshold for statutory sick pay provision to ensure everyone is entitled to SSP.
- The State should provide additional funds to ensure that employers can afford to pay sick pay and that all workers can be assured of coverage.

Education

GMB & UCU

38. Expansion of the Ulster University Magee Campus In Derry

Conference welcomes the recent publication of the Interim Report by the Magee Taskforce which outlines a road map for the expansion of the Ulster University Magee Campus in Derry. After many decades of government inaction and empty promises, this interim report, possibly for the first time in several generations, outlines a feasible pathway to deliver on the political commitment made in the New Decade New Approach (NDNA) agreement reached in January 2020.

Delivery of the Taskforce recommendations includes the potential to see the establishment of a university teaching hospital at Altnagelvin, including possible financial support from the Irish Government to build stronger collaboration on health provision to benefit all citizens right across the border region and beyond.

We acknowledge that delivery on such a scale to reach 10,000 students over the next few years will require significant commitment and investment from all concerned. This includes the Assembly Executive and others including the British and Irish governments, both in terms of capital and infrastructure investment, but also the creation of good quality teaching and support services jobs at the university, as well as other job creation opportunities linked to the increase of thousands of additional students and workers across the region.

Conference is disappointed however by the underwhelming ambition expressed in the draft Programme for Government, particularly as it applies to third level education access.

The departure from a clear commitment in the NDNA to securing at least 10,000 student places at Ulster University's Magee campus is deeply concerning. The draft PfG proposal to reach 'up to 10,000' places is a significant change in ambition both to addressing regional economic balance and providing people with the opportunity to benefit from greater access to higher education places.

Additionally the draft PfG makes no mention of alternative mechanisms for funding third level education beyond significant student contributions through tuition fees which discourage young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those from marginalised communities and areas of multiple deprivation. The further failure to address the artificial limit imposed on third level places by the Maximum Student Numbers (MaSN) cap is also contributing to degrading ambition for young people in the North-West.

Conference calls on the incoming NIC-ICTU to use its significant influence to support the ongoing work of the Taskforce in delivering significant change through the expansion of Magee campus. The NIC-ICTU should also add its voice to the growing demand that this time the people of Derry will finally witness the change they have been rightfully seeking for more than half a century.

Conference calls for a change to the draft Programme for Government to contain a clear commitment to a minimum of 10,000 student places at Magee, and we renew our support for free, third level education for all and call for a review of the MaSN cap with a view to its abolition.

UTU

39. Disability

Congress has huge concerns about the marked lack of progress on the part of the employers within the education system in addressing the issues pertaining to workers with disabilities. These individuals face daily challenges that are compounded by the absence of appropriate and reasonable workplace adjustment, often resulting in stress, alienation, and diminished career prospects.

Congress acknowledges the establishment of the Disability Employment Support Service (DESS) within the Education Authority and acknowledges and appreciates the work of the team within it. However, it remains clear that this has not, as yet, led to an understanding amongst employers within the service as a whole of the rights of those with disabilities, nor have firm procedures been established and mainstreamed around reasonable adjustment up to and including redeployment options to facilitate and support those with disabilities in school-based settings.

Congress believes that the education sector falls far short of its duties and responsibilities, and of other public sector settings, in that regard.

Congress, therefore, calls upon NIC-ICTU to challenge the Department of Education and the Employing Authorities on this issue and support the aims and efforts of the education workers and their unions to establish:

- robust workplace policies, practices and procedures which remove the barriers to the inclusion of disabled teachers and support staff
- professional development programmes to inform and educate school leaders and Governors regarding their duties and responsibilities under the legislation

a long-term policy for accommodating disabilities within the education sector which creates and fosters an inclusive workplace culture and environment.

INTO

40. Special Educational Needs

Conference:

a. notes;

- 1) the decreased SEND implementation funding made available to schools to support the proposed changes to the SEN Framework;
- 2) the dramatic increase in the establishment of specialist provision classes within mainstream schools (SPiMS);
- 3) the chronic underfunding and cuts to support services, adding an intolerable strain on school budgets and staffing resources;
- 4) that for SEND transformation to succeed there must be significant investment in training and support for schools;

b) calls on the Northern Ireland Committee of ICTU to;

- 1) lobby the NI Exec and Minister for Education to urgently fund the existing and future provision for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and to ensure that the changes currently being considered meet the needs of all children admitted to schools, particularly those with complex needs.
- 2) demand that the EA put in place appropriate mechanisms to ensure SEN pupils can gain access to all

services irrespective of their school placement or home address in a timely fashion.

- 3) campaign for appropriate funding and staff training to meet the needs of children with SEN within mainstream schools (SPiMS).

INTO

41. Early Years

Conference notes:

- 1) The priority in the Programme for Government to Deliver more affordable childcare;
- 2) The outcome of the PSEP scoping study;
- 3) The acknowledgement that childcare needs to become more accessible and affordable for all.

Conference calls on NIC-ICTU to;

- 1) Lobby the Minister for Education to urgently action the standardisation of full time Nursery places for all 3 year olds, and abolish the practice for dual day provision, thus delivering 22.5 hours provision per week.
- 2) Lobby the NI Executive to provide further subsidies to working parents for childcare to enable them to continue to work and support the NI economy.

NASUWT

42. Professional Regulation of Teachers

Conference believes that the current General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland is not fit for purpose and should be dissolved.

Conference is concerned that teachers are required to pay for registration from

a body which is controlled directly by the Department of Education with no input from the profession.

Conference is further concerned that the Department of Education is bringing forward proposals to create a replacement professional teaching body in Northern Ireland which is a non-departmental public body and designed to limit the voice of elected professionals.

Conference calls on the ICTU to work with affiliated teacher unions to ensure that any replacement body complies with the following principles:

- Any replacement body must be genuinely independent and not be subject to veto by the Department of Education.
- Teacher representatives should be restricted to those elected from the profession and appointed from the recognised trade unions.

Independent members of the new body should be independent of the profession and employing authorities

DTUC

43. Education

Conference notes that union membership has been steadily increasing over the past number of years and has risen from 199,000 members in 2016 to over 253,000 members in 2023. Recent successful conclusions to several long running industrial disputes have added impetus to this steady growth. It remains concerning that the unionised workforce represents only one third of the total employees in the region. Conference also notes that there is a gap in the Northern Ireland Curriculum surrounding the teaching of workers' rights and employment legislation. To maintain this upward trend in membership, conference calls on the Northern Ireland Committee to:

- Campaign and lobby the Department of Education, CCEA and any other organisation as they see fit, to ensure that the teaching of workers rights and employment law is included as part of the mandatory curriculum to be taught to all children in schools across Northern Ireland
- Liaise with Education Unions and other interested parties to develop clear and detailed guidance for content that they would like to see included in the Northern Ireland Curriculum, with the purpose of increasing awareness and understanding for children on the positive role that unions play in society and in their future lives

Trade Union Organisation

NIPSA

44. Inter Union Relations

Conference recognises that the deplorable practice of active large-scale poaching of each other's members by trade unions is detrimental to members interests. These practices reduce the capacity of members to fight for better pay and terms and conditions of employment, disrupts workplace trade union organisation and ultimately can cost members their jobs. The use of such methods indicates a poverty of ambition on the part of the trade union movement and a reluctance to face the challenge of organising the unorganised. In the long term such methods will have an extremely detrimental impact on the ability of the trade union movement to work under one umbrella organisation.

Conference, therefore, calls on Northern Committee of ICTU to take urgent steps to address this issue and to facilitate discussion between trade unions to reach agreement on spheres of influence and demarcation.

USDAW

45. Organising for the Future

Congress welcomes the fact that Northern Ireland again has the highest trade union membership density with 33.8% of workers being in a union. However, this is still 8.4 percentage points below where union density was in 1995. The figures are particularly concerning within the private sector where Office for National Statistics figures show that across Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales, 12.3% of employees are in a union.

Congress believes that our movement is only as strong as its members. To be as effective a voice as possible for working people in Northern Ireland, we urgently need to redouble our efforts to increase membership and ensure we have a strong presence in workplaces throughout the country.

Congress notes that there is significant under-representation of groups such as Black workers, women and young workers within the Trade Union Movement, and believes that this must be addressed so that our movement is fully representative of modern Northern Ireland. Engaging all under-represented groups in our work has never been more important at a time of such challenges.

Conference calls on the Northern Ireland ICTU to:

- Develop a strategy for increasing union membership, especially in the private sector, in consultation with affiliated unions.
- Work with affiliated unions to support greater involvement of union members from under-represented groups in union structures and activities.
- Involve the ICTU NI Youth Committee in specific work around the recruitment and development of young workers and reps.



Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Code of Conduct for Meetings Events and Courses

**Adopted by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Executive Council October 2024**

Introduction

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions has zero tolerance for any violence and any type of harassment including sexual harassment.

Violence and harassment in the world of work deprives people of their dignity and is incompatible with decent work. It is a threat to equality and equal opportunities and to safe, healthy, and productive working environments.

Violence, harassment and sexual harassment are contrary to trade union values and may prevent people, particularly women, from participating and advancing in the labour movement.

As part of our ongoing commitment to create working environments that are free from violence, harassment and sexual harassment, Congress has adopted the following Code of Conduct. This Code of Conduct applies to all Congress events, meetings and courses, regardless of venue.

Aim

The ultimate goal of this policy is to prevent incidences of violence, harassment and sexual harassment.

Congress is committed to organising events and other activities at which everyone can participate in an inclusive, respectful and safe environment. All members and participants at Congress conferences, events committee meetings or training

courses are expected to uphold this approach.

Applicability

The Congress Code of Conduct applies to all Congress meetings, events and activities, including Biennial Delegates Conferences, other conferences/seminar or events, Executive Council and Committee meetings, assemblies, receptions, expert meetings, courses, workshops, fringe and side event, social events and any other type of event hosted, sponsored or organised in whole or in part by Congress wherever it may take place. The code of conduct applies to everyone participating in Congress events and other Congress activities. The Congress code of conduct also applies in case an event or an activity is co-organised or co-sponsored together with another organisation.

Interaction with Affiliates Code of Conduct

Affiliates will have their own code of conduct and those attending at Congress meetings, events and activities will continue to benefit from their own organisations Code, policy and procedure, for example access to their person of confidence, representation by their union etc. This Code of Conduct does not replace the affiliates Codes rather it provides a bridge between affiliates codes, practices and procedures.



Expected Conduct

Congress expects all those involved in Congress activities and events to uphold our trade union values and to work to achieve an environment that is free from violence, harassment and sexual harassment.

Prohibited Conduct

Harassment constitutes unacceptable behaviour by one or more individuals and can take many different forms, some of which may be more easily identified than others. It can be a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment.

Harassment because of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, race, national origin, political affiliation, age, religion, class, and any other reason is unacceptable.

Sexual harassment is a particular form of harassment. It denotes any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature. Such conduct may be of a verbal, non-verbal or physical nature, including written and electronic communications, and may occur between persons of the different and the same gender. Some examples include unwanted physical contact, suggestive texts or images, unwelcome sexually-charged comments or propositions.

Complaint Process

It is in the interest of all parties to proceed with the necessary discretion to protect the dignity and privacy of all. Complaints should be made in the first instance as follows:

Irish Congress of Trade Unions Biennial Delegate Conference, Executive Council meetings and associated events to the General Secretary or to a person nominated by the General Secretary (this person will be of sufficient standing and experience to deal with the matters).

Complaints relating to the NIC-ICTU Delegate Conference or the NIC-ICTU meetings should be made to the Assistant General Secretary, or to a person nominated by the AGS (this person will be of sufficient standing and experience to deal with these matters).

Congress Committee meetings or events to the member of the Secretariat with responsibility for the Committee or event; or to a person nominated by the member of the Secretariat (this person will be of sufficient standing and experience to deal with the matters),

Complaints will be dealt with in a timely manner and in agreement with the parties and according to the guiding principles below. If necessary and agreed, external assistance or a 'person of confidence' may help. If it is established that harassment or sexual harassment has occurred, appropriate measures will be taken. This may include measures up to and including excluding persons who do not respect this policy from Congress meetings and events.

Guiding Principles for the Procedure

The procedure is by agreement and is carried out in a manner that respects fair procedures and the principles of natural justice.

Confidentiality will be assured in so far as it is reasonably practicable.



The terms of reference will be agreed and will set out the issues, objectives and scope of the procedure, its interaction with the affiliates own procedures and the languages and the relevant law that applies. The Terms of Reference should be clear and concise and not legalistic. It should be designed to fit the allegation and should include time frame, deadlines and the method of report.

Conciliation between the persons concerned is promoted but not required.

Everyone can be represented by their union during the process.

The procedure needs to strike a balance between involving the complainant and at the same time not expecting or making the complainant responsible for deciding the process, recommendations or outcomes.

The person undertaking the procedure will aim for agreement and will produce a report to the parties and the GS/AGS or Secretariat member detailing the recommendations and outcome.

Dispute about facts

If there is a dispute about facts, the Secretariat may also choose to establish an up to five-person Commission of inquiry. The members must be of sufficient authority and unrelated to the organisations to which the person involved belongs and will undertake actions necessary to determine the facts such as:

- interview the parties directly involved separately;
- interview other relevant third parties separately;
- produce a report detailing the inquiry, findings and any recommendations;
- determine on balance of probabilities whether or not the incident(s) of harassment or sexual harassment took place;

- if the inquiry cannot determine, on the balance of probabilities, whether the harassment took place, recommendations can still be made.

Outcomes and Remedies

Appropriate remedies to be recommended can include for example an apology in the context of a consultation, training for the person in breach of this Code of Conduct, recommendation for discipline of the person by their union/ affiliate, prohibition on attending at Congress meetings and events, or other appropriate remedies. Recommendations can also be made to Congress that aim to secure an environment free of violence, harassment and sexual harassment.

There will be follow up by the GS with the affiliates to ensure that the recommendations are implemented.

Appeal

Any appeal is to the Steering Committee who will deal with the matter in a confidential manner, this may include the establishment of an up to five-person committee for consideration of the appeal and their decision is final.

Final points

This policy does not replace legal responsibilities of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, it may be that these responsibilities change according to the relevant jurisdiction. Congress will report serious incidents to the appropriate authorities.

This Code of Conduct does not replace the right of a person to refer the matter to a criminal or other authority.





This Code of Conduct does not replace the responsibilities or obligations on employers to ensure that their workers are protected from violence, harassment and sexual harassment at work and to manage their workers.

This policy will be interpreted and applied in a manner that supports our staff and their policy and procedures relating to the prevent of violence, harassment and sexual harassment at work.

Irish Congress of Trade Unions

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