

TUC Anti-Racism Taskforce

**Organising workstream:
Regional mapping project**



Introduction to the mapping project

The TUC Anti-Racism Taskforce commissioned this piece of research at the end of 2021. The intention of the mapping project was to get an overview of what structures are in place for Black workers across the TUC's seven regions and nations in England and Wales, as well as to explore what is going well and what could be improved in terms of anti-racist strategy and organising.

The report was commissioned in the middle of the Taskforce's two-year lifespan. The results will feed into the Taskforce's final year of work, with the intention of creating a network of support for Black activists and identifying training and education opportunities where appropriate.

Methodology and break down of participants

The project was carried out by conducting online interviews. These fell into two rounds: the first was with senior staff members, including regional secretaries, equality and policy officers and policy and campaigns support officers. The second was with chairs, vice-chairs and regular members of Black workers' forums and committees.

In total, 16 interview participants took part, eight of whom were men and eight of whom were women. Roughly two-thirds of participants identified as Black/BME. At least two people were interviewed for all except two regions.

Given the relatively small sample size, the report is intended as an overview of the current situation, rather than a conclusive document, though some recommendations are included at the end.

Note on terminology

Throughout the report, the terms 'Black' and 'BME' are used interchangeably to refer to workers who identify as being from Black or minority ethnic backgrounds.

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LESE (London East & South East)

Region summary

Key statistics

- LESE (London, East & South East) is the most populous of the TUC's regions. It contains two million trade unionists and represents two-thirds of the Black workers in the UK.

Current structure and membership

- The LESE Race Relations meets three times a year and is currently meeting online due to the pandemic. It also hosts an in-person open day a year, when circumstances permit. The committee represents workers from a wide range of backgrounds and is well attended: most meetings attract 30–40 participants.
- The current chairs of the committee have been active on it for a number of years, with a substantial amount of experience campaigning on issues of equality and racial justice. All three were nominated by their respective unions. The Committee elected them as one chair and two vice-chairs. Elections for the positions take place yearly.

Key activities and organising strategies

- **Reading circle.** The committee recently started a reading circle focused on Black history, though there have been some issues with accessing funding for e-books. Several participants mentioned the need for more education and promotion of Black history and culture. A project exploring reparations has also begun.
- **Political issues.** The committee often debates current political issues such as the Nationality and Borders Bill, the treatment of asylum seekers and deportation flights. It also sometimes works together with other committees. For example, the committee has worked together with the LESE Women's Group, exploring some of the issues facing women in the workplace, including experiences of discrimination.
- **Anti-fascist organising.** The committee has been active in organising against the far right in the region, particularly in the 'doughnut' area around London, including areas such as Epping & Bexley. The committee has worked together with Unite with the intention of setting up a network of anti-racist/anti-fascist activists. This activity has stalled since the pandemic.
- In the past, the committee has also worked together with Stand Up to Racism, Searchlight and Kick It Out (particularly on a campaign against racist behaviour by football fans at West Ham).

What's going well?

- The committee has successfully organised against deportation flights, in some cases managing to have deportees removed from flights.
- Before the start of the pandemic, the committee held a successful in-person event focusing on the government's treatment of the Windrush Generation, which was attended by 50–60 people.
- All participants agreed that the committee was built around a supportive and committed team, and that it provided a useful forum for sharing experiences.
- There have been a number of cross-cultural events, such as a successful Irish history event.

What could be improved?

- **Building stronger links with national TUC bodies.** One participant described the committee as being “kind of in the middle” in terms of its effectiveness. While it has a strong culture of debate and discussion, the committee is not able to submit or suggest amendments to motions to the TUC Black Workers Conference or influence wider policy. The participant suggested building stronger links with the national TUC Race Relations Committee, in order for the two groups to be able to share ideas and resources when campaigning on similar issues.
- **Pervasive culture of racial discrimination within workplaces and unions.** All participants shared experiences related to racial discrimination in the workplace, including racist and sexist jokes being made against Black performers, or Black women being given promotions with no raise in salary. One participant talked about her own experiences of racial profiling and discrimination as co-chair of a separate committee, including disrespectful and dismissive comments that were made towards her by white committee members who couldn't accept that the chair of the committee was a Black woman.
- **Lack of progression for Black workers.** One participant expressed frustration with the fact that new training programmes were constantly being offered, but that this didn't seem to be having any positive impact on the experiences of Black workers. He described an “iron ceiling” preventing Black workers from accessing higher management positions within unions and suggested that this would only change with a substantial change in mindset among regional secretaries and other senior staff.
- **Need for mentorship instead of training.** Similarly, another participant suggested that a proposed Black Leadership Programme would be ineffective without real commitment to change from senior staff, such as a mentorship or coaching programme, whereby regional secretaries would provide one-to-one support to Black staff looking to rise up the ranks. She added that “putting on training for training's sake is not exactly helpful when it comes to applying and getting through to those positions within the unions themselves”.

Midlands Region summary

Current structures and membership

- The current structure is called the Inclusion Committee, which was formed around five years ago by merging the Black Workers Forum, Disabled Members Forum & LGBT forum. The forums merged at this point due to a lack of enough participants for separate forums. The Inclusion Committee currently meets four times a year, often around key events such as Black Workers' Month and Disabled Workers' Month.
- Technically, members need to be nominated to the committee by their union, but at the moment there is an unofficial policy of not turning away anyone who wants to get involved.
- One participant who is an active committee member, got involved around a year ago. He had not been aware of it before his union (GMB) recommended that he join. Since joining, he has attended online meetings around once a month. As meetings have been held online over the previous year and there has been less space for introductions, he's not aware of the roles of the other committee members.

Key activities and organising strategies

- **Leicester garment industry.** There is a lot of ongoing work around the Leicester garment industry, which is predominantly made up of female Asian workers, who are being heavily exploited. A lot of time is being invested into trying to encourage union membership among this group.
- **Networking role.** The TUC has the potential to perform a networking role in the region, connecting existing Black workers forums, and facilitating their activities, rather than creating an entirely new structure.
- Some of the themes that have come up in recent committee meetings include how members are coping with the Covid pandemic as well as the government's treatment of the Windrush Generation.

What's going well?

- Overall, the committee member's experience has been positive: hearing first-hand about fellow workers' struggles and experiences, such as mistreatment at work, has been beneficial.
- The Equalities Conference, which was set up a few years ago, has generally had a good turnout.

- **Learning from other committees.** There are lessons to be drawn from successes within other committees in the region, in particular the Women's Committee and the Pensioners Committee, the latter of which has been very successful due to being led by a handful of retired activists who have funnelled their energy into the committee and have the flexibility and time commitment to do so.
- **GMB reports.** Many of the themes that the Inclusion Committee is exploring have been mirrored within GMB. In 2002, the GMB commissioned a report by Dr Elizabeth Henry into the union's policies with regard to race and inclusion. This happened in the wake of the Macpherson Report into institutional racism in the Metropolitan police. As a result, GMB has created a race sub-group within its structures to explore these issues.
- Twenty years on from the report, the Central Executive Committee of the GMB is trying to find ways to implement some of the recommendations made in the report. Some of the nine recommendations include ethnicity monitoring of GMB members and creating a post for a dedicated race officer.

What could be improved?

- **Levels of engagement.** In the past, the Black Workers Forum was heavily dependent on a small number of individuals. When they left, the momentum for the forum fell away, a pattern which has been mirrored in other equalities committees.
- **Online meetings.** While the pandemic has obviously necessitated the shift to online meetings, this strategy has the risk of alienating some members, or hindering participation, due to long Zoom meetings which sometimes run to 90 minutes.
- **Internal bureaucracy.** There is a reserved seat for Black workers on the regional council. However, there are difficulties facing new members wanting to get involved. While someone may have the experience and capacity to join the committee, they may struggle to do so without a formal union nomination. This means that the membership of the committee remains largely fixed.
- **Committees as superfluous.** There is a perception among some unions that committees are irrelevant or superfluous. There is concern that "for unions, the TUC is always seen as a bit extra – they'll have their own committees and so forth, so I'm not sure it's top of their agenda".
- **Lack of time.** Many people are too busy to commit, due to work and other commitments. On the other hand, the Pensioners Forum is very active, largely because its members have lots of time to commit to it.
- **Black Leadership Programme.** There has been discussion and support for the idea of having a programme to encourage Black reps into leadership roles. However, at present, this lacks any formal policy to structure to implement it.

Events and conferences

- **Equalities conference.** Under normal circumstances, there is an equalities conference held every year in October, which has normally been successful and has drawn a variety of activists from different equalities strands. In October 2021, there was a switch to an equalities week, which was held online due to the pandemic, during which various committees were invited to run half-hour briefings.
- **Stand Up To Racism.** There is also an annual Stand Up To Racism conference held at the end of May/start of June.

Northern Region summary

Current structures and membership

- The current structure is called the Race Advisory Group and has four members. This has been in existence for a number of years and was first brought into being in response to far-right organising in the region, particularly around Tyne and Wear, where far-right candidates were standing as local councillors. The current chair is a member of Unison's self-organised group. While the chair of the working group was nominated, everyone else was invited via word of mouth.
- In the past, the Race Advisory Group frequently mobilised around anti-fascist events and responded to emerging issues in the region. It continues to work closely with anti-racist groups in the region, particularly Show Racism the Red Card.
- The group used to meet quarterly but does not have regular meetings at the moment. It is currently in the process of shifting its focus and developing a new strategy.

Key activities and organising strategies

- **Black Workers Forum.** As the purpose of the Race Advisory Group has shifted over time, there have been discussions on whether to have a different kind of space for Black workers, such as a forum dedicated to sharing ideas and experiences, with more of an emphasis on training and education. In order for this to happen, it would need to be agreed with the chairs and vice-chairs of the advisory group, as well as with the regional secretary.

What's going well?

- **Anne Frank exhibition / Holocaust Memorial Day.** The Race Advisory Group has coordinated significant anti-racist activities in the region, including a big exhibition with the Anne Frank Trust, and a launch event for Holocaust Memorial Day.
- **St George's Day.** The group has historically held events on St George's Day with explicitly anti-racist messaging, in order to "capture the messaging away from any other groups that might want to congregate in our city centre".
- **Ambassador training.** TUC Northern has been instrumental in designing this training course, together with Show Racism the Red Card. This course "equips people to be champions in their workplace, to be able to feel empowered to challenge racism". The course is 12 weeks long and is aimed specifically at Black members and young people. As part of the course, a delegation is sent to the site of concentration camps in Poland, where they are able to see first-hand the consequences of racism and fascism.

- **Unconscious bias training.** Another course that has been well received so far is the Unconscious bias training, also delivered with Show Racism the Red Card, which has been offered to a number of employers across the region. This has proven to be a successful way to open up discussions about racism and discrimination in workplaces.

What could be improved?

- **Current structure.** Over the past two years, the group has experienced a degree of uncertainty as to what it should focus on. But following a successful equalities conference in September 2021, and continued discussions among the chairs and the regional secretary, there is a strong impetus to create a stronger structure focused on education and empowering activists to tackle racism and discrimination in their workplaces.
- **Black Leadership Programme.** While there is support for this kind of training within TUC Northern, the current conversations are geared more towards wider equality training, drawing on the good practice of some members unions (such as Unison) with regards to representation and diversity. Equalities training would cover Black members, disability, LGBT+, women and youth.
- **Demographic statistics for the region.** While there has been an acknowledgement of the negative effect that Covid has had on Black communities in the region (and nationally), it is unclear what information is being collected by unions in the region about numbers of unionised workers from a BME background. There has been a tendency to focus on the public sector, but there is also a need to focus on the “vast array of minimum wage industries” in the region, as well as the STEM fields.
- **Static leadership.** In some unions, there is the issue of static leadership, in which the same people tend to run the equalities working groups for a long time, which means there isn’t much space for new ideas or innovation. There is a wider issue of poor representation of BME workers in trade union leadership roles across the country.

Events and conferences

- There was an equalities conference at the end of September 2021, which was well attended.
- There are regular collaborations with Show Racism the Red Card, eg on anti-racist demonstrations.

North West Region summary

Current structures and membership

- The North West region currently has a Black Members Committee. Up until two years ago, all the different equalities strands were merged into one committee, but this changed partly in response to pressure from the current chairs for a standalone committee for Black workers, and an upsurge in engagement around racial justice issues due to the Black Lives Matter movement.
- The Black Workers Committee holds a seat on the NW TUC regional council and executive council. It meets three to four times a year and it is currently jointly chaired by a member of Unison and a member of the NEU.
- There has been some confusion as to what the formal TUC structure is supposed to be or how it operates. There was an AGM in Jan 2020, during which it was possible to elect delegates to the NW TUC conference. During the second AGM in 2021, after the then regional secretary declined a request to allow trade unionists from other unions, who were not delegates, to attend, a motion was put forward to create a members' forum which could bridge the gap between the committee and Black members who wanted to get more involved.

Key activities and organising strategies

- **Black Members Forum.** This member-led forum has been running informally, alongside the committee for two years now. Over that time there have been three meetings to provide space to Black members from different unions to discuss the issues they're facing. Common issues raised include discrimination at work and having to deal with union structures that don't provide space to talk about race issues.
- **Anti-racist organising.** Anti-racist work in the region has tended to focus primarily on anti-fascism. Working together with organisations such as Unite Against Fascism and Stand Up To Racism, trade unionists have opposed far-right organising by the BNP and Nick Griffin (who holds a seat in the region and is an MEP) and Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (Tommy Robinson), who has been known to target traditionally Labour-voting council estates in Liverpool.
- One of the chairs of the committee has been active in working with Stand Up To Racism in opposing the Nationality and Borders Bill.

What's going well?

- **Attendance at forums.** The forums have been well attended so far, with between 20–35 participants, as well as guest speakers. Members representing eight different trade unions have attended.

- **Online forums.** During the pandemic, there have been a number of online forums which have been very successful, pulling in between 80–120 participants. These have been on a variety of topics. The one held in June 2021 was on racism, Covid and BLM, in which Kim Johnson MP, and Paul Kearns from Stand Up To Racism took part.
- **Mental Health Matters.** There is also a monthly Mental Health Matters event. Last November, this was brought together with the Black Workers Committee to focus specifically on mental health issues within Black communities.
- **Working with external anti-racist organisations.** TUC North West often supports protests/demonstrations by Unite Against Fascism, Show Racism the Red Card and Stand Up To Racism.
- **Ambassadors programme.** This was run with Show Racism The Red Card in September 2021, to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the organisation's founding. This involved seven weeks of two-hour educational sessions with union reps, which were held online and had 18 participants.
- **Amplifying activist voices.** There has been an attempt at the management level to try to encourage promising participants from the Young Workers Committee to get involved in the Black Workers Committee.

What could be improved?

- There have been a number of issues related to how the formal committee operates, who is able to attend, and how communication is disseminated. These include:
- **Lack of clarity on who is part of the committee.** One participant described a "battle from day one" in finding out what the formal structure is and how it's supposed to function. At present, both committee chairs are unaware of who the other committee members are or how to contact them. They have been told this is due to 'GDPR'. In other words, the regional secretary is not able to disclose who the other members are due to data/privacy concerns.
- **Lack of clear communication from TUC.** It is usually up to the regional secretary to contact member unions, and invite delegates to the committee, but the committee chairs are concerned that this information is not always being passed on to members.
- **Lack of awareness about the committee among Black members.** Many individual unions do not have Black members groups, which means they don't receive information about, or aren't aware of the existence of, the TUC North West Black Members Group. Both committee chairs expressed similar concerns about the idea of a Black Leadership Programme: "I'm sure there'll be a phenomenal number of people who'll be very interested, but they won't even be aware of it."
- **Nomination process.** The fact that committee members have to be nominated through their unions sometimes prevents new members being able to access it. As one participant put it: "The committee as it is now does not provide sufficient

flexibility or scope for it to actually achieve its role properly, because you have to have nominations through particular structures, that people aren't aware of."

- **Lack of support for Black structures.** Both committee chairs expressed concern that senior union staff are not showing sufficient support for Black structures. "It's almost like they're more interested in controlling the structure, rather than encouraging Black members that may be in their branch to get them actively involved in the structure that they may feel more comfortable with".

South West Region summary

Current structures and membership

- TUC South West does not currently have a specific structure in place for Black workers. The main reason for this is a lack of sufficient numbers. Senior staff have been reluctant to create another committee, as they do not want to be seen as “creating a committee for the sake of creating a committee”.
- However, TUC South West has been trying to facilitate conversations between existing Black workers’ committees within unions across the region, with the intention of creating an inter-union network of Black committees/groups that are able to share experiences with each other.
- Many unions in the region have their own Black worker committees. These are generally self-organised and fall outside of formal union decision-making structures. Though they may be active, they are often not able to influence policy or bring motions to conference.

Key activities and organising strategies

- TUC South West conducted a survey on Black structures and anti-racism within unions (see appendix).
- There is currently a Development Programme in place, designed to get BME reps “in front of the officers and the regional secretaries who may not know that they exist”.

What’s going well?

- **Hinkley Point.** A participant cited Hinkley Point (site of a nuclear power station in Bridgewater, Somerset) as a successful example of anti-racist union organising. The site has a large number of BME workers, as well as Eastern European migrants and workers from other parts of the UK. There was a level of resentment from local residents, due to high levels of unemployment in the area. However, GMB and Unison campaigned to ensure that all workers employed received the same levels of pay, and also worked together with the local authority and police to challenge racist attitudes in the area.
- **Active UNISON groups.** Some local committees within UNISON have been particularly active. This is especially the case for Bristol, and was later replicated in Bournemouth, with the self-organised Black workers group holding events and training courses for members.

What could be improved?

- **Disillusionment.** A participant described a widespread sense of disillusionment among Black workers in the region: "I got the sense that a number of them [BME reps] are very disillusioned with the trade union movement". This was due to experiences of not being listened to, or due to the perception that unions are mere "talking shops" which are not serious about tackling racism.
- **Reluctance to change.** A participant described an issue of some post holders within the executive keeping their position for very long periods of time and often being resistant to change or new policy ideas. These are "people who just love being a rep, or just love having that position in the branch. They might be retired, but they're still holding on to it, and as a result, they create difficulties for anybody new".
- **Isolation of Black members in rural areas.** With the notable exception of Bristol, which is the largest and most multicultural city in the region, a participant described the Southwest region as "very much a monoculture", which is overwhelmingly white and predominantly rural. This has meant that conversations around race have often not progressed very much, and many unions were "having conversations that probably were taking place in the seventies". BME union members in areas such as Devon can therefore find themselves particularly isolated.
- **Lack of cooperation between unions.** In general, only larger unions, such as Unison, have the resources to set up their own committees, and can sometimes be reluctant to allow other spaces to emerge. A participant pointed to the example of the Bristol Unison group expressing resentment towards a group in Bournemouth which was set up with similar aims, as they were seen as "taking the glory away" from the Bristol group.
- **Racism within unions.** As well as widespread problems of racism within workplaces, many reps from BME backgrounds have expressed concern about racism within unions themselves, and how difficult this can be to address. For example, there are often complex complaints procedures and internal structures that may prevent union officers who have been accused of racist behaviour being removed from post.

Conferences and events

- There are currently no regional conferences on the issue of race, though this may change if the TUC South West is able to strengthen its role facilitating dialogue and cooperation between member unions.

Wales TUC summary

Current structures and membership

- Within the General Council of the Wales TUC there is a Pan-Equality Committee. This is made up of five elected members who represent the protected characteristics of disability, LGBTQ+, race, women and youth. The Pan-Equality Committee meets quarterly. Each of its five different forums are free to organise themselves and meet as often as they want.
- In the past, due to funding/staff restrictions, the individual forums were brought together into one overarching structure. With a rule change in 2022, there are likely to be more resources available to support the forums for each equality strand. This has partly come about because individual committee members have become more vocal and active during the pandemic.

Key activities and organising strategies

- **Race Equality Action Plan.** Wales TUC is notable among the TUC's regions and nations for having a close relationship with the devolved Welsh Government, which operates on a tripartite social partnership model, in which business, trade unions and the government are able to jointly create policy.
- The REAP is a huge piece of work, which acknowledges the systemic racism that exists within Wales, and seeks to shift the government to an anti-racist position. Two senior members of Wales TUC have been instrumental in formulating the REAP, together with the Welsh Government. One member was seconded to the Welsh government to work on the REAP for nine months, while another led the Wales TUC response.
- The REAP was open for consultation between March and September 2021 and had over 330 responses from trade unions, the bulk of them positive. By comparison, a typical response would be 30–40.

What's going well?

- **Risk Assessments for frontline staff and whistleblowing site.** When the pandemic hit, Wales TUC arranged a meeting with the first minister to discuss forming a group to create a risk assessment strategy to protect frontline staff. Out of this, a whistleblowing site was created, where workers could alert the TUC if employers were not providing adequate risk assessments.
- **Black Workers Hotline.** In recognition of the fact that the pandemic hit Black workers in Wales particularly hard, several third sector organisations, in partnership with the TUC, set up a hotline offering support to Black workers, including funding for a law firm to take on complex cases. As a result of the hotline, Welsh unions

have seen an increase in membership and engagement, as well as an increase in members wanting to become workplace reps.

- **Regular meetings with the first minister.** The Pan-Equality Committee began meeting with the Minister for Social Justice, Jane Hutt, once a month, to provide evidence on the difficulties Black workers were facing. These meetings led to the recommendation that a specific action plan around race was needed.
- **Union organising drive among taxi drivers.** Following a successful drive to unionise taxi drivers (85 per cent of whom are from BME backgrounds and in the 50+ age group), there are now almost 3,000 taxi drivers across Wales who are members of a union. These are primarily members of Unite, with smaller numbers who are part of GMB and RMT.
- **Toolkits.** Wales TUC launched several toolkits including on mental health, young workers, gambling and one for older workers. All of these have been launched with an online event.

What could be improved?

- **Racism within unions.** Some Black-led organisations in Wales have been critical of the fact that suddenly “the trade unions have woken up and realised that there’s such a thing as institutional racism” and have argued that there needs to be a deeper examination of racism within union structures.
- **Working with third sector groups and organisations.** This work is being undertaken with a view to educate and improve union relations and gain access and recognition for workers in this sector, which is delivering important equality-focused public services that have been procured out such as domestic violence and mental health support. The WCVA (Welsh Council for Voluntary Action) is seen as a key social partner of the Welsh Government. Establishing better sectoral bargaining coverage across Wales in this sector as a key wellbeing indicator and enabler of fair work and proposed fair work duty on the public sector through procurement is of strategic importance to building union strength in Wales.
- **Black reps training.** When the TUC Anti-Racism Taskforce was first created, there was a target to identify an additional 1,000 Black reps across the country. Several participants argued that this was unrealistic without first getting to grips with institutional and structural bias and racism within the movement first, which often stand in the way of progression for many existing Black reps.
- **Danger of ‘box ticking’.** At an online event held with Black reps in the South West region, in which a member of Wales TUC was also present, the response to the idea of a Black Leadership Programme was that there was a need for tangible results and structured career advancement, otherwise such an exercise risked being perceived as nothing more than ‘box ticking.’
- **Equality reps as ‘token jobs’.** Participants mentioned the issue of Black reps often being given equality roles within their union branches but that these often weren’t given the level of responsibility they required, or the amount of facility time needed

to do the role. These roles should “have a degree of responsibility, it needs to be seen as important within unions.”

- **‘Diversifying workplaces’.** One recommendation from the REAP has been to diversify workplaces, but one participant argued that this is often happening in workplaces where pay and conditions are poor. “A lot of the workplaces that they’re picking to diversify are the poorer paid workplaces where terms and conditions aren’t great, and where people aren’t getting a good deal in work.”
- **Issues in social care sector.** The minimum wage within the social care sector in Wales recently rose to match the real living wage. While this will be beneficial to the many women and BME workers who are employed in this sector, one participant argued for more to be done to improve opportunities for progression. There is also the fact that when sick, agency staff felt they had to continue working during the pandemic due to lack of proper sick pay.

Events and conferences

- **Equalities Conference.** This is normally held annually in April. However, due to the pandemic, the focus has shifted to holding online events.
- **Consultations.** Alongside the consultation for the REAP, there have been other consultations, including on the LGBTQ+ Action Plan, Period Dignity strategy and Violence Against Women and Domestic Abuse strategy. A participant mentioned that the voices of Black women and disabled workers were often overlooked, so consultations are sometimes followed by focus groups to ensure that these voices are included.

Yorkshire & the Humber Region summary

Current structures and membership

- Yorkshire and the Humber has an Equalities Committee, which is currently chaired by a union official from Unite. Alongside this, there is a Black Members Network, which operates on an informal basis. There was a suggestion to merge the Black Members Network with the existing Equalities Committee, but this was rejected on the basis that there was a need for a specific space to address questions around race, which might otherwise get lost in wider conversations.
- Most people currently get involved through word of mouth, rather than through a formal nomination process. Information about the Black Members Network was initially spread person-to-person at conferences, as well as through the TUC's email lists.

Key activities and organising strategies

- Activities are currently taking place online. There have been regular online meetings about different issues over the past one to two years. Recent topics have included the effect of the pandemic on mental health, the effects of Covid-19 on Black communities, legal claims, and Black leadership in union structures. Most of these online sessions have been well attended.

What's going well?

- **Stand Up To Racism.** There is a strong Stand Up To Racism group based in Sheffield, who have been collaborating on events with TUC Yorkshire, including an online event about opposing racism. The Sheffield group has been working on issues around refugee/migrant solidarity and opposing the government's Borders and Immigration Bill.
- **Yorkshire Cricket Club.** There was a conference motion to speak out against racism at Yorkshire Cricket Club, again supported by Stand Up To Racism.

What could be improved?

- **Recording of demographic information.** Neither unions in the region nor TUC Yorkshire and the Humber tend to record any information about numbers of Black workers. When unions have been contacted about this, there has been very little response. There may be a need for a top-down push for this information to be collected from the national TUC level.

- **Awareness among member unions.** There is a lack of connection with member unions, who are not publicising the Black Members Network (BLM) (or don't know that it exists) so levels of participation remain low. One member of the network suggested unions need to have a strong commitment to make sure their members are made aware of it. The regional secretary wrote to member unions to inform them of the group, but only received two or three responses from member unions.
- **Stronger engagement/commitment from unions.** BLM highlighted many of the issues facing Black workers, but few unions are taking the opportunity to properly discuss these issues. Simply raising issues around race and providing opportunities for workers to discuss these in a safe way, would be a positive step forward.
- **Time commitment.** For many potential members, being able to commit additional time to a committee in the evenings remains a problem.
- **Lack of Black leadership.** The underrepresentation of Black union members at management/senior level (both in Yorkshire and nationally) means that union structures do not always look or feel representative for Black workers. This means that issues around discrimination at work may not always be taken seriously, or unions may sometimes lack empathy for the particular experiences faced by Black workers.
- **Black union members pushed into equalities roles.** Due to the low numbers of BME workers in management positions, those that are active in their unions often find themselves working in equalities roles.

Events and conferences

- There are regular TUC/Stand Up To Racism events in the region.
- There have been discussions around mobilising for UN Anti-racism Day in March 2022.

Conclusions and next steps

Overview

The following points were taken from a meeting held on 31 March 2022, which included members of the TUC's Anti-Racism Taskforce, TUC regional secretaries and committee members from regional structures. They are intended both as a summary of the conversation, and as pointers to take forward conversations within Black workers' structures across the TUC's regions and nations in England and Wales.

1. Social and political context

- Several participants stressed the importance of understanding the two main issues which have shaped union organising around race over the past two years: the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Black Lives Matter movement.
- Participants described how lockdown had meant organising had been limited by the necessity of organising purely online, and that this needed to be taken into account when assessing the work had been done over the past year.
- However, there was consensus among representatives from several regions that BLM had led to an increase in activism by Black activists, and an increase in engagement around racial justice issues in general, and that this energy should be harnessed going forward.

2. Upskilling and development

- The TUC Anti-Racism Taskforce originally proposed the creation of a network of Black activists around England and Wales, and a Black Leadership Programme to provide additional training to activists and reps.
- While there was some support for such a programme in principle, there was also a degree of scepticism expressed by several committee members and regional secretaries. This scepticism was either related to the resources available for such a project, or to its efficacy, with several members expressing frustration with the idea of 'training for the sake of training.'
- There was some discussion about how to rethink the idea of 'training', and whether to frame it instead in terms of 'activist development' or 'upskilling'. This was linked to broader questions around how to make best use of existing organising spaces.
- Participants also mentioned the need for unions to take on some of these issues themselves and to help find solutions.

3. Union rules and committee structures

- A common theme across regions was that current union structures and committee rules often act as an impediment to getting more activists involved. The precise reasons for this differed by region, but common concerns included the complexity, rigidity or opaqueness of committee rules.
- Nomination procedures were often a cause for concern. Several participants suggested that having to be nominated for the committee by a union secretary held back prospective activists from getting involved in committees.
- There was a substantial discussion around the issue of 'closed' committees (which require a formal nomination in order to join) versus 'open' committees (which have fewer formal requirements for getting involved, and often allow anyone who wants to get involved to do so). While there was generally a lot of support for making it easier to access committees, some participants described what they saw as the potential problems with this approach - such as the fact that without union nomination, there is potentially less accountability and democracy. In addition, one participant talked about the problem of activists not getting replaced once they left the role, because unions were no longer nominating.
- One participant highlighted the fact that current union rules reflect a particular set of power relations and that unions need to take these into account in order for change to occur.

4. Connecting structures across regions

- During the initial research, several participants expressed concerns at the fact that they felt the power of their committees was limited, as they were not able to influence policy making or pass motions at a national TUC level. Many suggested finding ways to integrate the regional committees with the national TUC Race Relations Committee.
- There was also a lot of discussion of how to connect and integrate committees at an inter-regional level, in order to build stronger networks of activists and learn from each other's best practice.
- Some participants suggested finding ways to increase dialogue between equality strands (eg race, disability, LGBT+) in order to find commonalities and work on issues with an intersectional focus.

5. Communication

- Several participants talked about communication issues, particularly in terms of how regional secretaries communicate with committee members. A recurring theme was that not all unions have their own internal structures for Black workers, meaning that emails sent by TUC regional secretaries often have nowhere to land. There is some work to be done in terms of establishing the best way for TUC regional offices to communicate with activists from affiliate unions and to encourage them to get involved.

- Specific issues in one region related to information sharing. Members of the Black Workers Committee were told by senior staff members that they wouldn't be able to share the details of who other committee members were, creating obvious problems in terms of contacting those members or organising.

Appendix 1: Survey results from Black union reps in the South West region

Review following TUC South West's questionnaire on unions' anti-racism and Black networks

Many thanks to those who completed what turned out to be a rather lengthy survey. We greatly appreciate your time spent sharing this information.

Summary

We received responses from: Usdaw, NASUWT, NEU, Musician's Union, PCS, Unite, FBU, UNISON and GMB.

All had groups set up to represent race equality, promote diversity, and tackle racism. It is clear from this survey that unions have considerable work going on behind the scenes to support Black, Asian and other ethnic minority workers and members.

Firstly, unions vary in their definition of non-white members eligible to represent their networks – including 'BME', 'BAME', 'BAEM', or 'Black'. In this survey we use all to encapsulate unions' terminology but have worked on the assumption that these terms relate to members who identify as Black, Asian, or are a person of colour or from another minority ethnic background.

Most respondents have regional groups that meet on average 4 times a year, with the exception of one union which organises events and training sessions led by their national task force. Activities or events are in addition to these meetings.

The size of each group varies: typically, 10 – 20 members in the region (with national groups larger in size) and comprised of regional officers, union reps and self-identifying members and activists. However, for a couple of unions the number of representatives on the regional group are not prescriptive and determined by the group itself.

Selection for these groups equally varies. All unions encourage take-up from their membership even if they do not hold a particular rep role. Some unions require nominations via branches, or selection via an election process, coordinated or endorsed by the union's regional council. For the unions with self-organised groups, members self-select at their regional AGM.

Two unions have also coordinated 'listening circles' with Black members encourages to share their lived experiences in the workplace and the union.

Objectives for each union's BAME groups range from:

- Raising awareness of Black members' experiences at work

- Challenging stereotypes and confirmation bias
- Tackling racism on individual and industrial levels
- Ensuring the union effectively reflects all its members' experiences
- Finding and campaigning around BAME members' issues, (eg campaigning to challenge discrimination, injustice and inequality for black pupils and teachers)
- Increasing BAME members engagement in the union
- Networking and training for BAME members (see below for more information).

When we asked officers who had completed this survey if they "think this group is meeting its objectives", using the scale:

1 = Very dissatisfied

2 = Somewhat dissatisfied

3 = Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

4 = Somewhat satisfied

5 = Very satisfied

All but one union recorded 3 – neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

The other union reported feeling "somewhat satisfied".

Reasons for this include not having a regional representative on the national task group so being unable to comment; the difficulty of the past year to run effective campaigns in workplaces (although the focus on equalities has been maintained); the fact that there is much work to still be done to tackle racism across the board; two unions expressed concerns that engagement with the group by others and/or its Black members has been low. And one union's group is still relatively newly formed and still determining its focus and objectives.

It is worth pointing out that this survey was largely completed by regional officers/secretaries who at a recent Executive Committee expressed feeling unable to comment definitively about their group's efficacy.

We also asked specifically if unions' BAME groups had supported any initiatives or campaigns in the past year on:

Black Lives Matter

This included: supporting the BLM movement by inviting activists to meetings, supporting the committee to lead on BLM action in their communities; union leaders' statements of support for actions, and involvement in rallies locally and regionally.

Covid

There was a lot of action on this front: developing up to date materials for members on the latest policy; producing Covid-19 risk assessment templates, guidance and training;

health and safety guidance for BAEM members; organising Black members' events including on the impact of Covid on Black workers, and seeking to raise the profile of such members who were most likely to be key workers on the front line, and thus most at risk; specific campaigns for members (eg supply teachers).

Training offered in the past year

For reps

Six of the nine responding unions provide some form of training for reps. This ranged from developing a Black Women in Leadership course; supporting all reps to attend a national tackling racism course; a national five-day leadership course for BAEM reps, as well as ongoing regional or national training courses available to all reps on subjects such as equal opportunities, equalities, unconscious bias in addition to existing TUC Education equality courses.

For members

There were fewer opportunities for members to access training, with three responding unions reporting this is largely led by national offices. Some unions allow members access to the previously mentioned reps' training courses on leadership and anti-racism.

For officers

There were fewer opportunities for officers' training this year.

One union, however, has carried out unconscious bias training this year and a couple of others also offer equalities training as above to their officers.

Other training

One union in this region is seeking to develop training on race discrimination for employees in the coming months.

There were also inductions available for national executive members from one union, action plans developed on equality, diversity and inclusion by another, and one responding union ramped up its activities during Black History Month including an event on "challenging the legacy of colonialism and enslavement".

Tackling racism

All but two of the responding unions reported they also offered their own training programme aimed at tackling racism: two are national courses; four are regional.

One union specified this was aimed at branch level to non-Black members but admitted take up was low. However, this was before the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter

movement. Another union offers specific Racism and Tolerance – changing attitudes in the workplace training. Another union includes CPD training for its members.

Tackling racism training consisted of embedding equalities training into all courses, conference workshops, or general equalities training courses.

Specific training for Black members

Five out of the nine unions have offered or offer this, three being regionally led, and the other two led by their respective national office

One union runs Black members weekends as part of their BAME members/activists training programme, but it appears those unions that do offer regional or national training courses, they are not as frequent.

As noted above, two unions have also been running BAEM workshops/ listening circles to all regions over the last nine months to engage better with and encourage more BAEM members to become active in the union or provide space for Black voices to be heard.

Black reps that form part of one responding unions' forum are provided with training, and Black women members also encourage to take part in their leadership programme.

A few unions reported intentions of organising another training or leadership programme for their Black members this year or after the pandemic.

How unions are tackling racism

Campaigns

All unions support and are involved with a broad range of anti-racism campaigns, whether led by their working group on local issues/workplaces, national union or TUC campaigns or supporting external campaigning groups such as Show Racism the Red Card; Runnymede Trust, programmes for schools and educators, Hope Not Hate, Stand Up To Racism; Black Lives Matter, and more.

These activities are also taken up regionally by unions in various forms depending on the campaign or initiative. Three unions also use these wider campaigns to build greater engagement with their black members. Some unions have also organised in conjunction with their working groups specific events for the region.

One union's self-organised group had coordinated a national event for Black members but unfortunately this has had to be postponed.

In workplaces

There is a plethora of training (as noted above) for reps and in some cases officers. Unions also provide plenty of materials for reps, CPD training and one union also encourages BAEM monitoring and equal pay audits that include race as well as gender.

One union raised the concerted attempts to promote their national protocol on cases involving racism which places an onus on branches to ensure race cases are referred promptly, including a specific review process to ensure these cases are taken seriously. These efforts have shown an improvement in finding cases and supporting them through to Employment tribunal.

In the union and its structures

Two unions made reference to policies that promote equal opportunities and which ensure equality and zero tolerance of racism in the union. Some unions also have reserved seats within their structures, provide budgets for regional working groups and seek to ensure a diverse recruitment of staff and training through effective policies and practices.

Within its membership

As above all unions' rules and policies are designed to ensure and encourage equality. Alongside training materials and resources for members and supporting and running anti-racism campaigns across the union.

What can the TUC South West do to assist in unions' work?

Given the level of activity taking place in unions who responded, TUC South West is keen to avoid replicating work already being done.

One respondent to the survey warned against creating a committee or group for the sake of it.

However, sharing best practice and supporting education in workplaces was a common request amongst unions, as was supporting and attending unions' own events on these issues.

It was also felt that TUC South West should do more to promote and include BAME voices in discussion groups as well as organise Black members/workers events to help unions build engagement.