

Disabled workers and unions

The TUC Equality Audit 2014 looks at the steps trade unions are taking to ensure they reflect the diversity of the workforce. It provides examples of how unions are encouraging groups that tend to be under-represented into membership and activism (women, BME, disabled, LGBT and young workers) and how they are giving them a voice in their internal democracy. The full report is available here: <http://www.tuc.org.uk/about-tuc/equality-issues/equality-audit/equality-audit-2014-improving-representation-and>

It is based on responses to questionnaires that were sent to all 54 TUC affiliated unions in November 2013 for completion by the end of January 2014. Completed questionnaires were received from 36 unions, representing 67 per cent of affiliates. But as the response rate was better among larger unions, the 2014 audit covers over 5.6 million members or 95 per cent of all TUC-affiliated union members.

This briefing summarises the audit's key findings in relation to disabled workers. Please see the full report for more detailed commentary and examples of good practice from unions.

Disabled worker representation in unions

According to the Labour Force Survey, disabled employees are more likely to be union members than non-disabled employees – 14.2 per cent of union members were disabled in 2013 compared to 11.9 per cent of all employees.

Monitoring disability is more problematic than monitoring by gender, age or ethnicity. Some individuals may not want to disclose a disability and some may not consider themselves disabled, for example, if they have a condition that is well managed.

The audit found that more unions carried out disability monitoring in 2014 compared to 2011. Thirteen out of 36 unions responding to the Audit (36 per cent) were able and willing to provide data on the proportion of their membership who considered themselves disabled and the proportion in various union positions. They were: BECTU, CSP, CWU, FDA, Napo, NASUWT, NGSU, NUJ, PCS, Prospect, SOR, UCU and Unite.

Looking at the data, it seems that there is still a degree of misunderstanding or unease among members when they are asked about whether they are disabled for union membership records. Among the unions that provided data, the proportion of members who considered themselves disabled varied from 0.1 per cent to 8 per

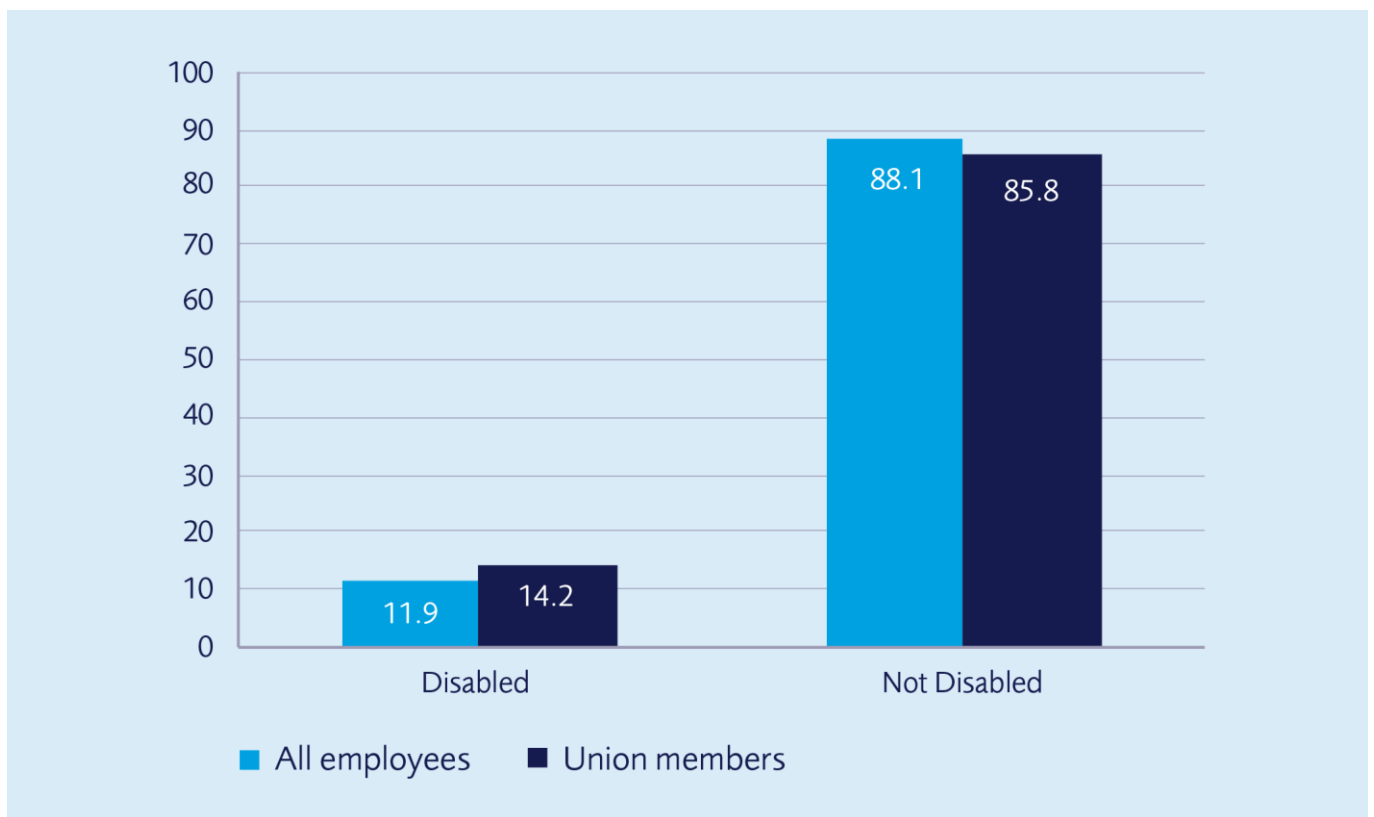
cent, some way behind the proportion of disabled union members according to the Labour Force Survey.

The data also suggested that among the majority of these unions, disabled members were well represented or over-represented in all union positions. However, what the data is more probably showing is that those who have taken up an active role within the union are more comfortable about declaring a disability or are more likely to consider themselves disabled.

The accuracy of the union monitoring data should improve as more unions repeat and refine their questioning and as they raise awareness and understanding of disability issues.¹

TUC monitoring data shows that 12 per cent of delegates to Congress 2013 identified as disabled.

Representation of disabled workers in union membership (%)



¹ See the TUC's *Disability and Work* guide for advice on disability monitoring.

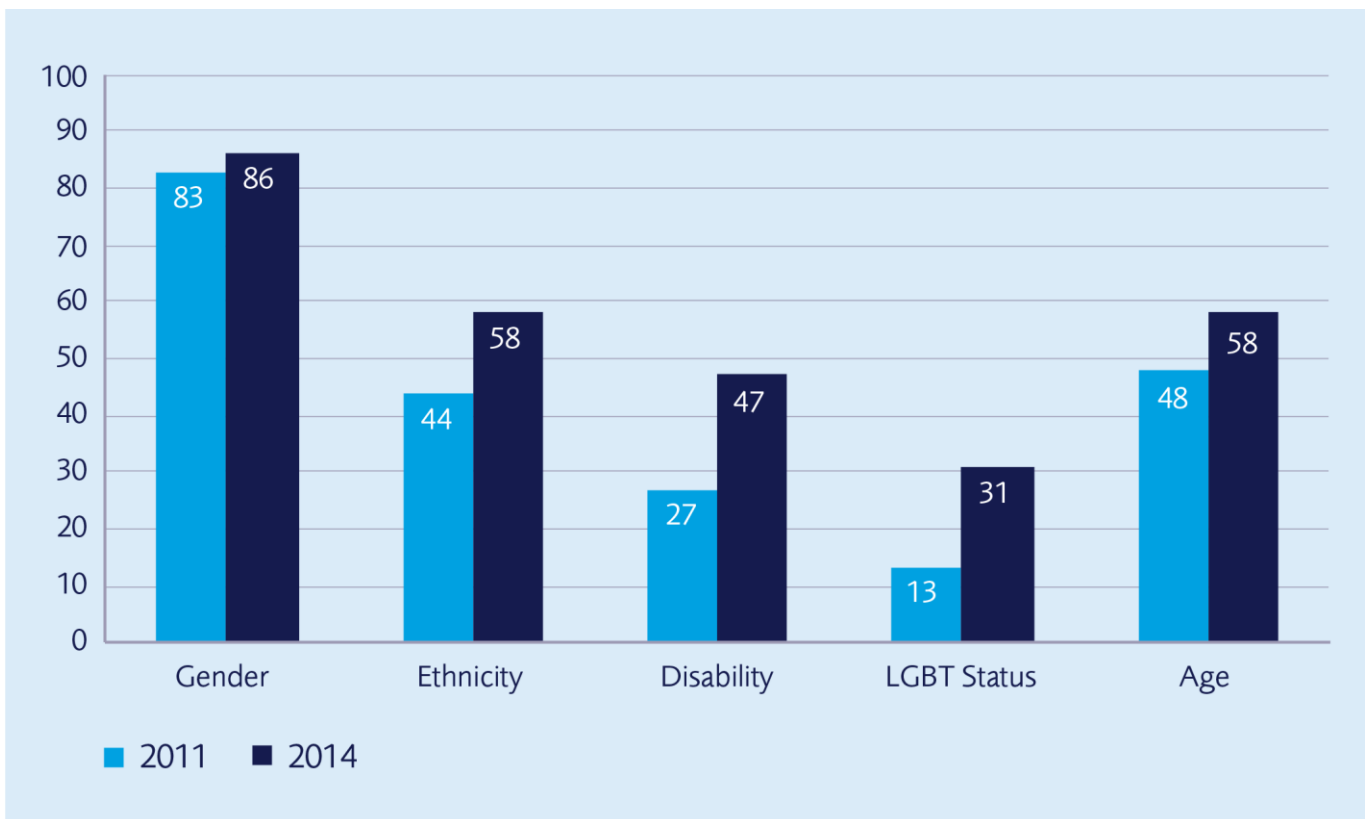
Improving representation in membership and participation

Monitoring

There has been a substantial rise in the proportion of unions monitoring the disability status of their membership – 47 per cent of unions now do so compared to 27 per cent in 2011. However, not all the large unions carry out such monitoring, so despite the improvements, still only around half of union members are asked about their disability status for union membership records, whereas 99 per cent are asked about their gender, 83 per cent are asked about their age and 77 per cent are asked about their ethnicity.

Fewer unions monitor the proportion of workplace reps, conference delegates and national executive committee members who are from a BME background, but there has been progress here too since 2011. Around a third of unions monitor the disability status of their shop stewards, health and safety reps, learning reps and branch officers. About two in five unions monitor the disability status of their conference delegates, their TUC Congress delegates and their national executive committee members.

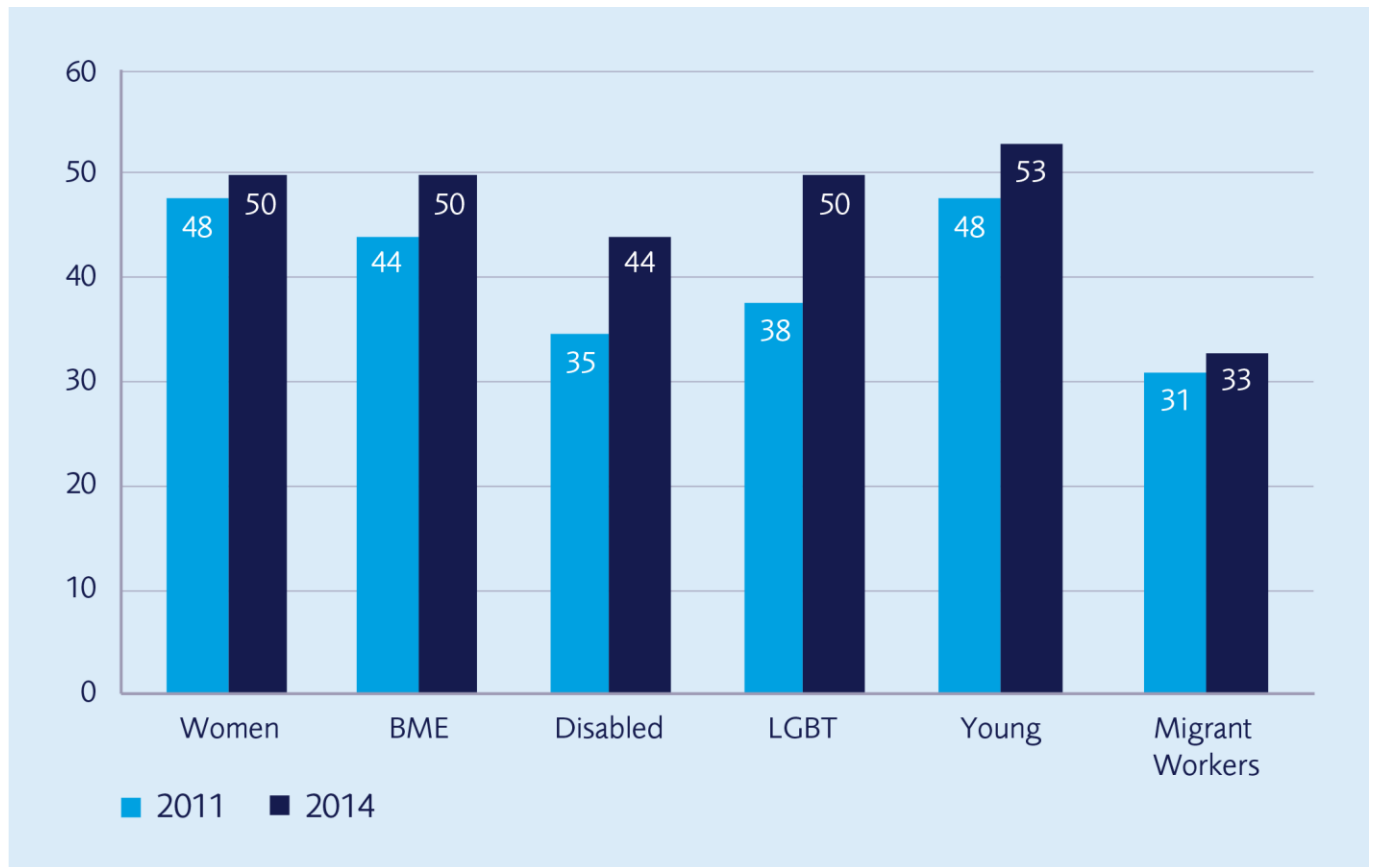
Unions monitoring membership by protected characteristic (%)



Targeted recruitment

The audit shows that there has been a significant rise in the proportion of unions with campaigns and activities to attract disabled workers into membership – 44 per cent of unions compared to 35 per cent in 2011. However, disabled workers are one of the least likely of the under-represented groups to be targeted in recruitment drives.

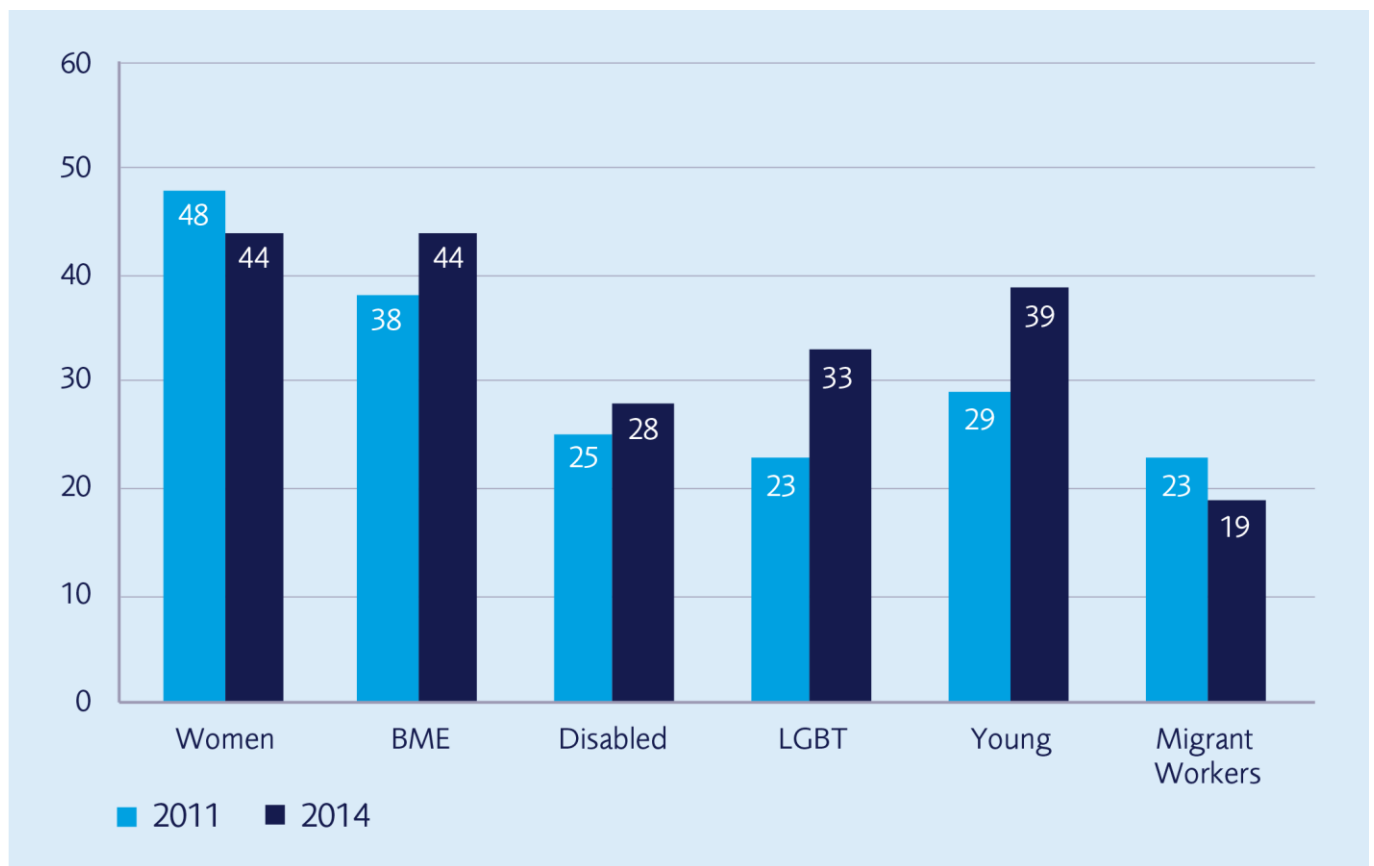
Unions taking action to recruit from different groups (%)



Encouraging participation

The proportion of unions that have taken specific action to encourage disabled members into shop steward or branch officer roles has risen slightly since 2011 – 28 per cent, up from 25 per cent.

Unions encouraging members from different groups to become shop stewards/branch officials (%)



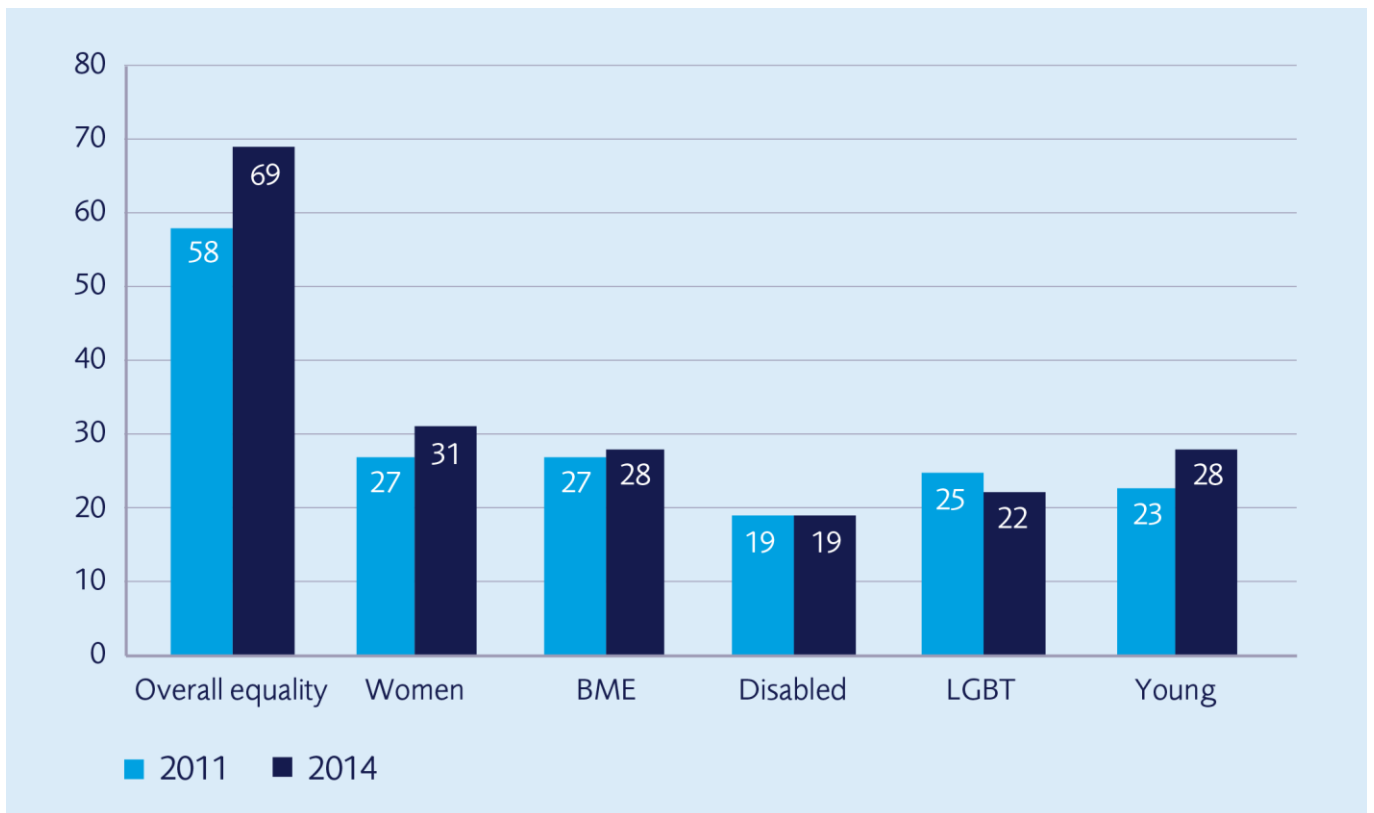
Disability officers

Nineteen per cent of unions employ staff at national level with specific responsibility for disability equality. This is unchanged since 2011. There are fewer unions with disability officers than the other kinds of equality officer at national level.

There has been a substantial rise in the proportion of national disability officers who have other responsibilities besides disability equality. This is the case in 86 per cent of the unions with such officers, compared to 44 per cent in 2011.

Larger unions were asked if they employ any equality staff at regional, group or sectoral level. The proportion of unions with disability officers at this level has risen from 14 per cent to 18 per cent in the last three years. As with national staff, the vast majority have other responsibilities besides disability equality.

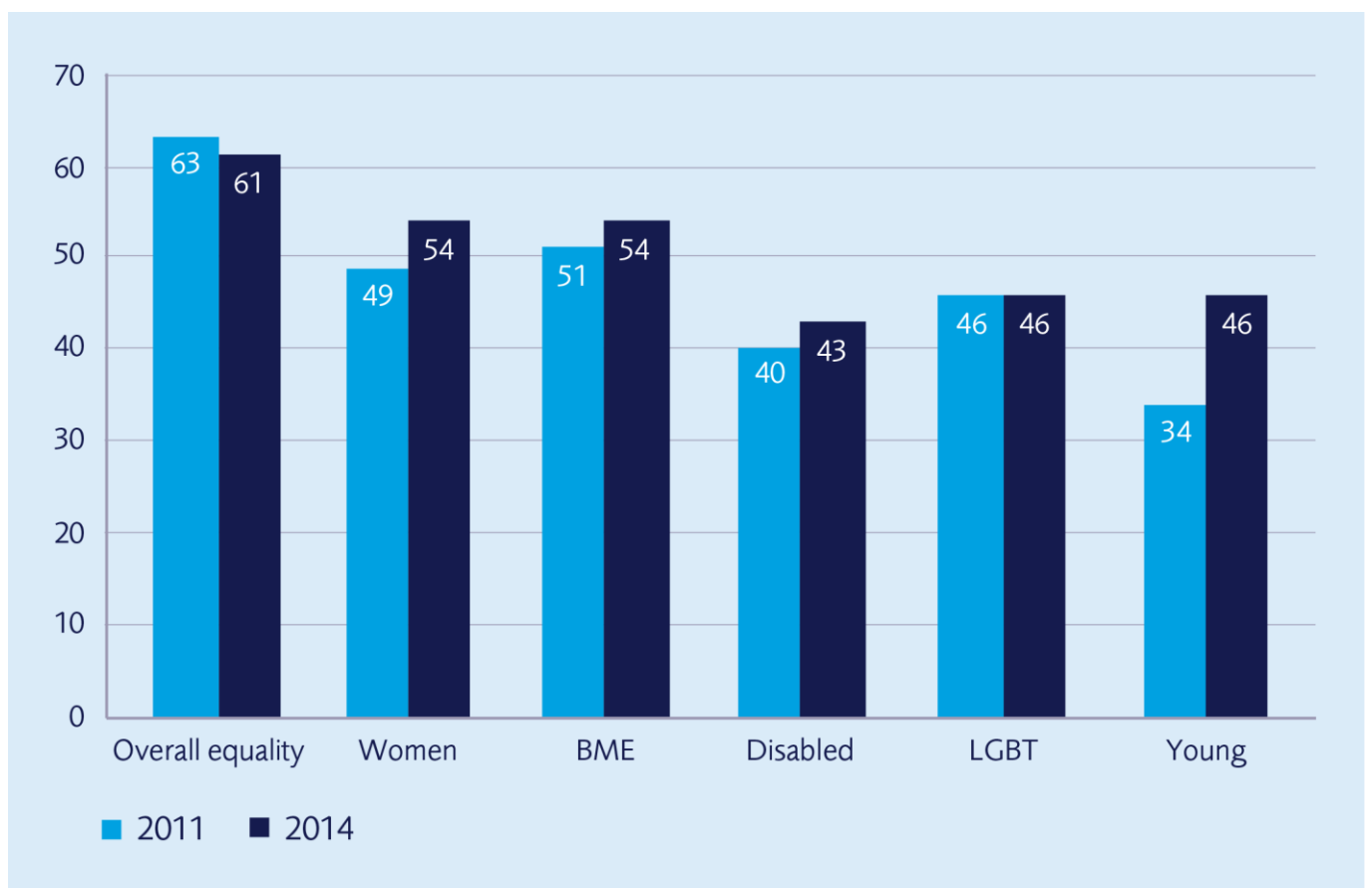
Unions employing equality officers at national level (%)



Committees

The larger unions were asked whether they have a disability committee or similar body at national level. Forty three per cent do so, up slightly from 40 per cent in 2011. Four-fifths of union members are in a union with such a committee.

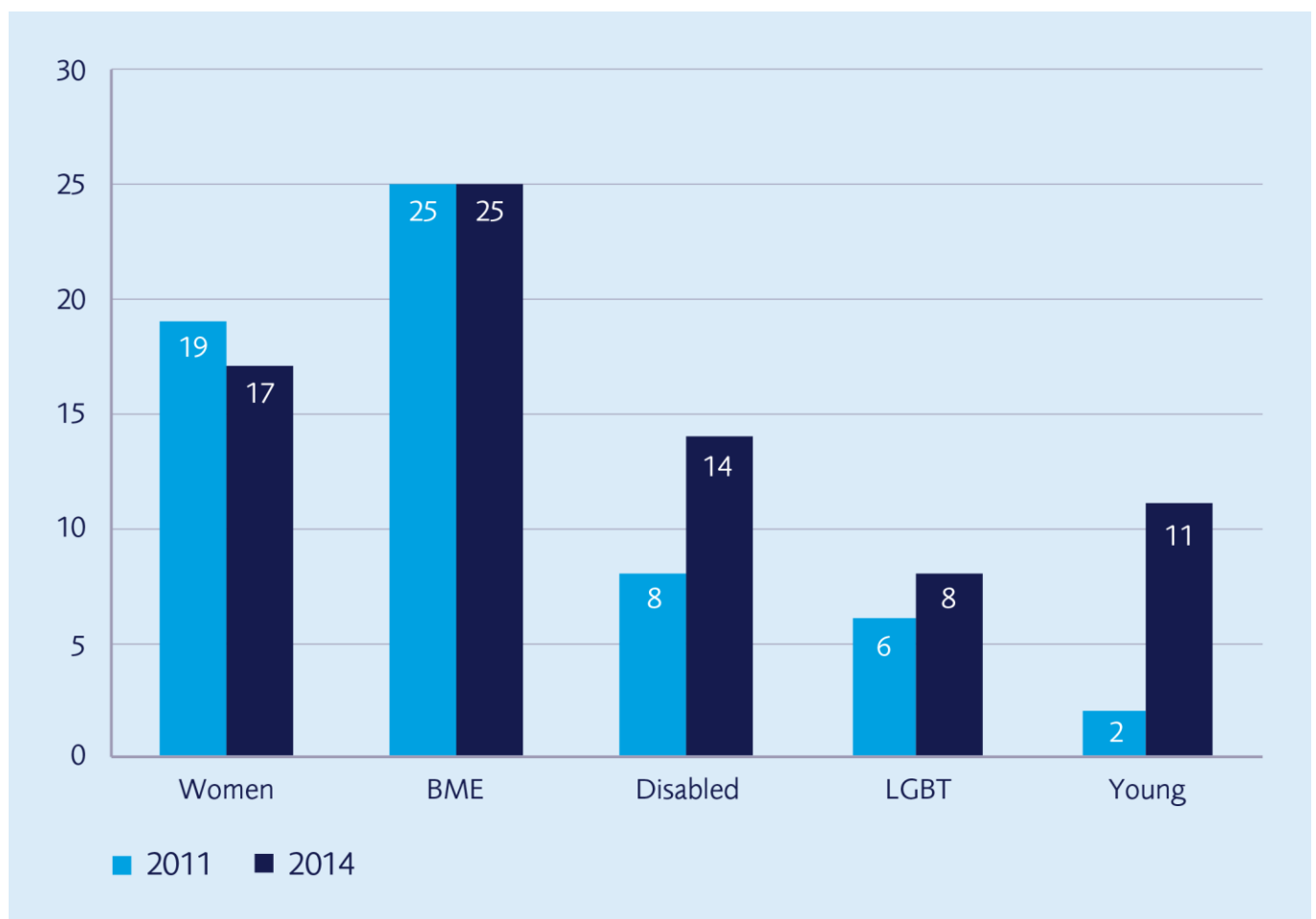
Unions with equality committees or similar bodies at national level (%)



Reserved seats

There has been a significant rise in the proportion of unions with reserved seats for disabled members on their national executive – 14 per cent now have such seats up from 8 per cent in 2011. The unions with such seats are: Equity, NUJ, NUT, UCU and Unite. They account for a third of union members.

Unions with reserved seats on national executive (%)

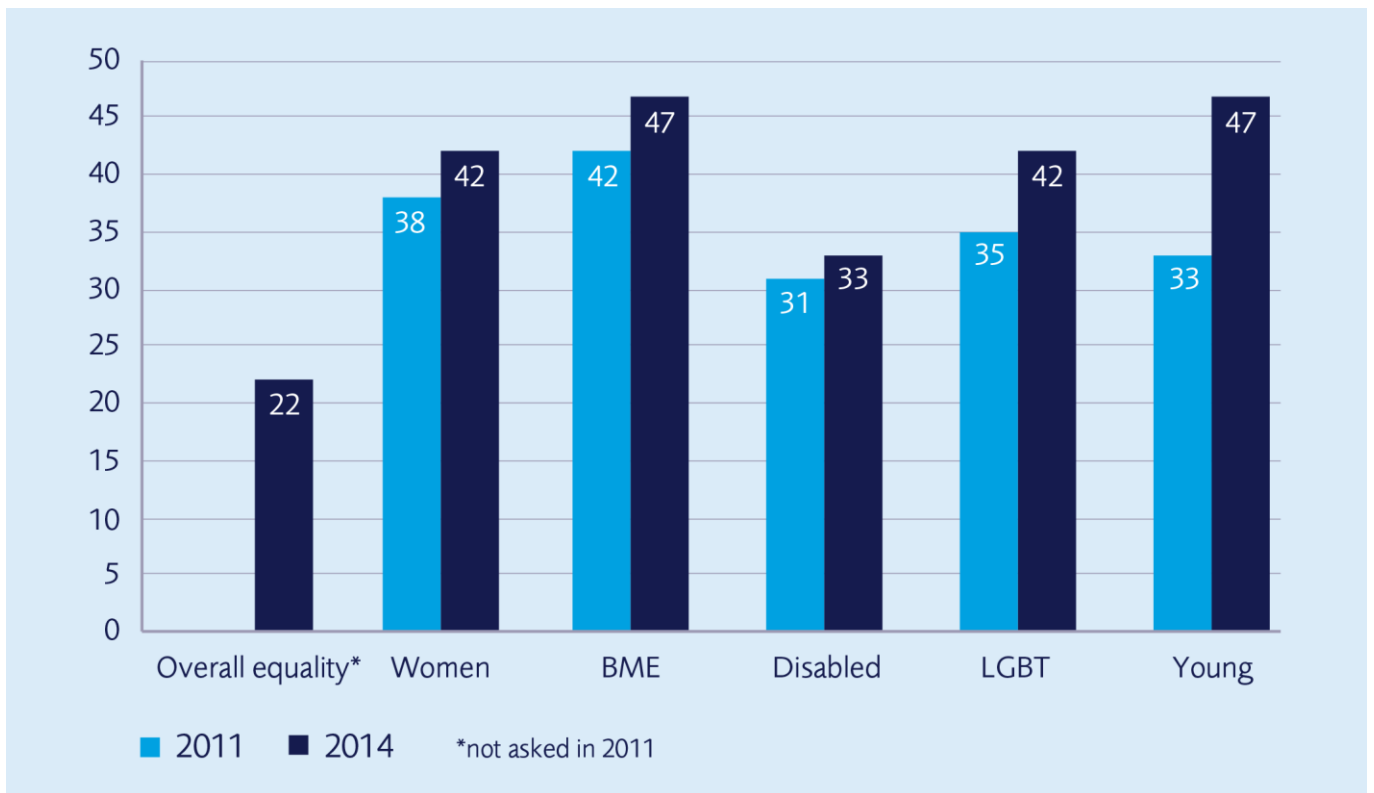


Conferences

A third of unions hold a delegate conference or similar event at national level for disabled members. This is up slightly from 31 per cent in 2011. Over 80 per cent of union members are in a union that holds such an event.

There has also been a slight increase in the proportion of unions holding conferences or events for disabled members at regional or local level – 32 per cent do so, up from 29 per cent in 2011.

Unions holding equality conferences or seminars at national level (%)



Campaigns and communications

A majority of unions (58 per cent) reported having taken some measures to make their campaigns and communications materials accessible to people with visual or hearing impairments, a slightly higher proportion than the 52 per cent reporting this in 2011.

A number of unions, including Equity, FDA and Prospect, have audio versions of their union journals for visually impaired members. Many unions make their publications available in Braille, such as Unite, which has an employee who translates its materials into Braille.

Websites offer the possibility of providing more accessible information. The NASUWT says its new website uses a common accessible design throughout the site rather than providing text-only pages for disabled users, and seeks to comply with Priority 2 of the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. UNISON is currently adapting its website to have BSL and subtitles for the use of deaf and hearing-impaired members.

Trade union training

There has been a general decline in training targeted at particular groups. The proportion that provides specific courses for disabled members has fallen significantly since 2011 – from 31 per cent to 21 per cent.

However, more unions are taking action to encourage disabled members to participate in their general education and training – 47 per cent, up from 38 per cent in 2011. More unions are monitoring the take up of their training and education services among disabled members too – 64 per cent compared to 40 per cent in 2011.

Larger unions providing targeted training and education (%)

