**North East unemployment rate still the highest in the UK**

Last week’s figures show a rise in employment, but the unemployment rate in the North East is still the highest in the UK and well above the national average, at 7.5% compared to 4.9%. And the slowdown in wage growth is cause for concern – real wages are only rising because of low inflation.

We know many of the young workers aged under 30 and usually outside of education– are more likely to be low paid and less likely to be in secure work. Their work is more casual, more exploitative and this age group is significantly less unionised.

So, how best can unions help young workers have a better experience of work? We asked some of our current young trade union members.

**Sophie, aged 28, Unite**

“*Working in hospitality can be really insecure. There are lots of young people and migrants. You can be especially vulnerable if you don’t know your rights. That’s why it’s important to know the union has got your back.*

*We recently ran a campaign on fair tipping. Waiting staff often have their tips stolen by their company from payments made by card. We were sick and tired of hearing about awful practices in the sector where it seemed obvious to us that front of house and kitchen staff should get the tips.*

*We focused on Pizza Express. We staged protests, got media interest and signed up the restaurant staff to the union. Customers started to ask where their money was going. Pizza Express dropped their so-called “admin fee” on card payments following our actions. So did the burger chain Giraffe. The government even published a report to promote fair tipping practices as a result of our campaign.*

*It showed me how much power we have. It highlighted the real benefits of trade unions to make serious, positive changes in people’s lives and be a force for good in society. I am definitely looking to get more active in my union and get better and better working terms and conditions for myself and others.”*

Creating great jobs for everyone is at the heart of the TUC’s priorities and a subject that was debated at the 148th Congress in Brighton last week.

The TUC campaign plan has been set for the next year. We will be developing a clear agenda to push for decent pay and conditions, security, and an appropriate employment status for workers across the outsourced and non-traditional employment sector and in so-called “uberised” work. We will advocate to retain, enhance and extend to more workers the UK’s package of employment rights, protections and benefits, and we will press the case for higher wages and collective bargaining. We will campaign to lift the cap on public sector pay. We will argue for workers’ voice at all levels – including on company boards. And we will set out how the UK economy uses new advances in technology inclusively, to create better jobs and raise productivity.

Theresa May says she wants an economy that works for everyone. That means a real effort to drive up pay and quality employment. And the government should stick by its promise to give the lowest paid a pay rise, with increases in the national living wage.

Beth Farhat

TUC Northern Regional Secretary