

Women 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 women. Please see the full report for more detailed commentary and examples of good practice from unions.

Women's representation in unions

Official statistics on the labour market and trade union membership show that union density is higher among men than women. In 2013, 55 per cent of union members were women, whereas women make up 49 per cent of UK employees.

Trade union density is highest for women in professional occupations (60 per cent are union members compared to 30 per cent of men in professional occupations). Teachers, midwives and nurses are examples of professions that are female-dominated and highly unionised and therefore account for a high proportion of female union members.

In most of the non-professional groups, men are more likely to be union members than women. Part-time workers are also under-represented in trade unions, the majority of whom are women.

Twenty-five out of the 36 unions (69 per cent) provided data on the proportion of women in membership and the proportion of women in various union positions, though not all could provide data for all the union positions. The unions who provided data were: AEP, ASLEF, ATL, BECTU, CSP, CWU, Equity, FDA, GMB,

MU, NACO, Napo, NASUWT, Nautilus, NUJ, PCS, Prospect, RMT, SOR, TSSA, UCU, UNISON, Unite, Usdaw, and WGGB.

Among these unions, the proportion of women in membership varied from 4 per cent to 81 per cent. This reflects the wide variation in workforce composition in some of the sectors and occupations in which the unions organise.

Representation of women in union membership (%)



In the majority of the unions providing data, women were under-represented relative to the proportion in membership among shop stewards, health and safety reps, branch officers, union conference delegates and TUC Congress delegations and on union executives. In most unions, women were well represented, or often over-represented, among union learning reps and equality reps.

TUC data from Congress 2013 showed that 42 per cent of delegates were women and the proportion of women speakers at Congress was 38 per cent.

In 2013, 26 out of 58 members (45 per cent) of the TUC General Council were women.

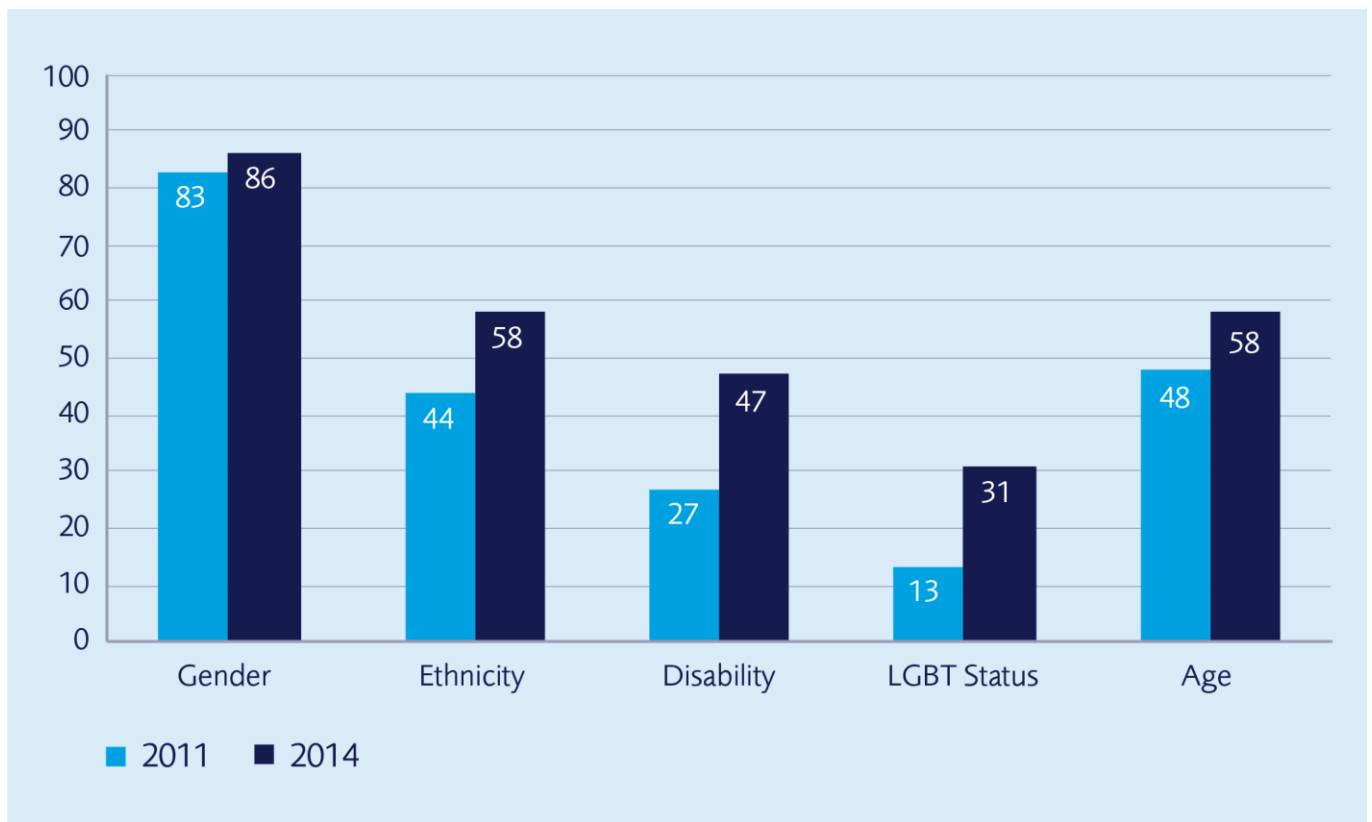
Improving representation in membership and participation

Monitoring

Nearly nine in ten unions gather information on the proportion of women in membership. As monitoring is most common among large and medium-sized unions, 99 per cent of union members are covered by gender monitoring.

Fewer unions monitor the proportion of workplace reps, conference delegates and national executive committee members who are women, but the number that are doing so has risen significantly since 2011. Around two-thirds now gather information on the number of women in shop steward, health and safety rep, learning rep and branch officer positions. Sixty nine per cent have data on the gender make-up of their conference delegates, 75 per cent their TUC Congress delegates and 81 per cent their national executive committee members.

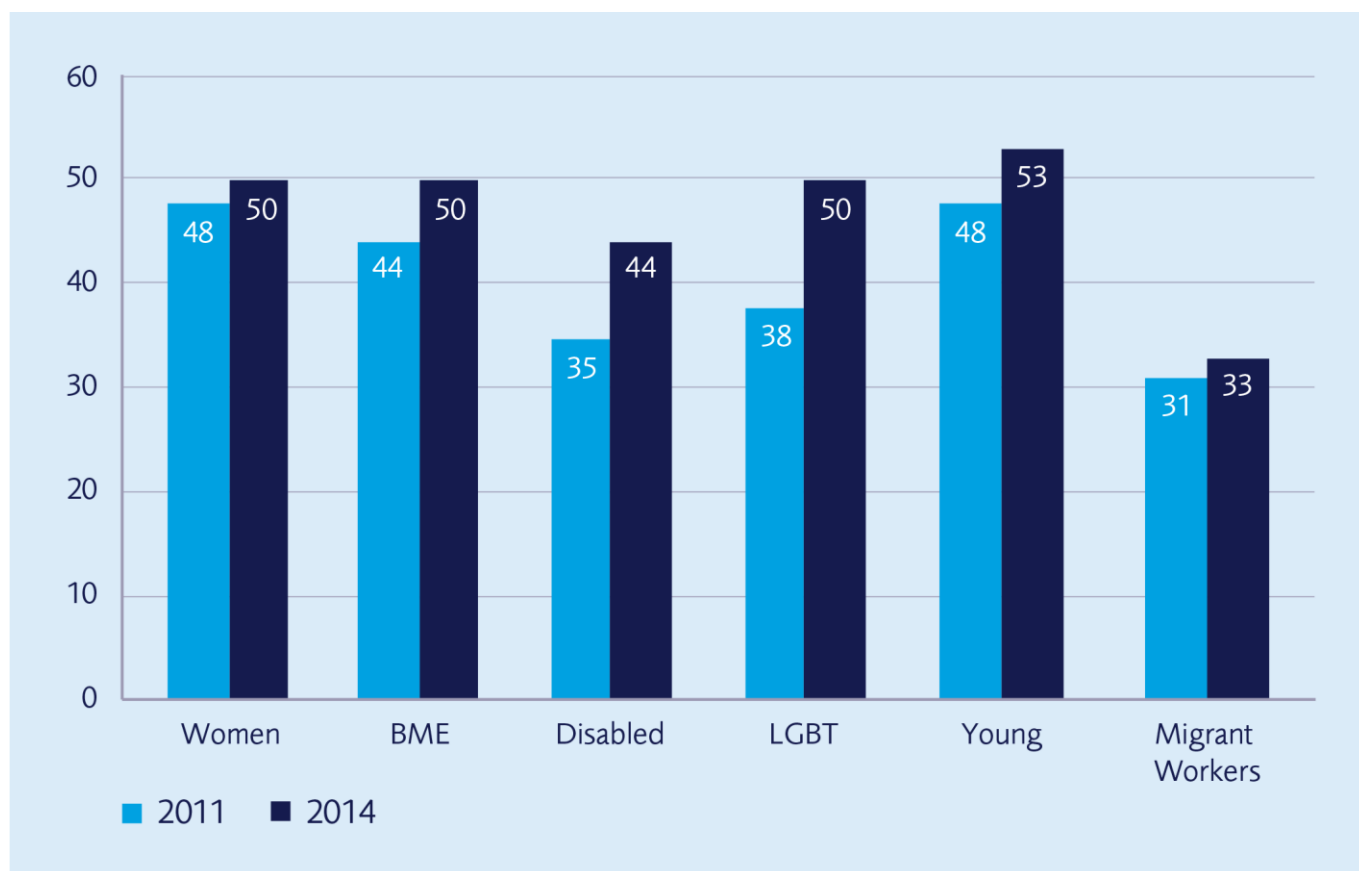
Unions monitoring membership by protected characteristic (%)



Targeted recruitment

The audit shows that half of unions are undertaking specific activities to encourage women into membership. (The full audit report includes examples of some of these activities.)

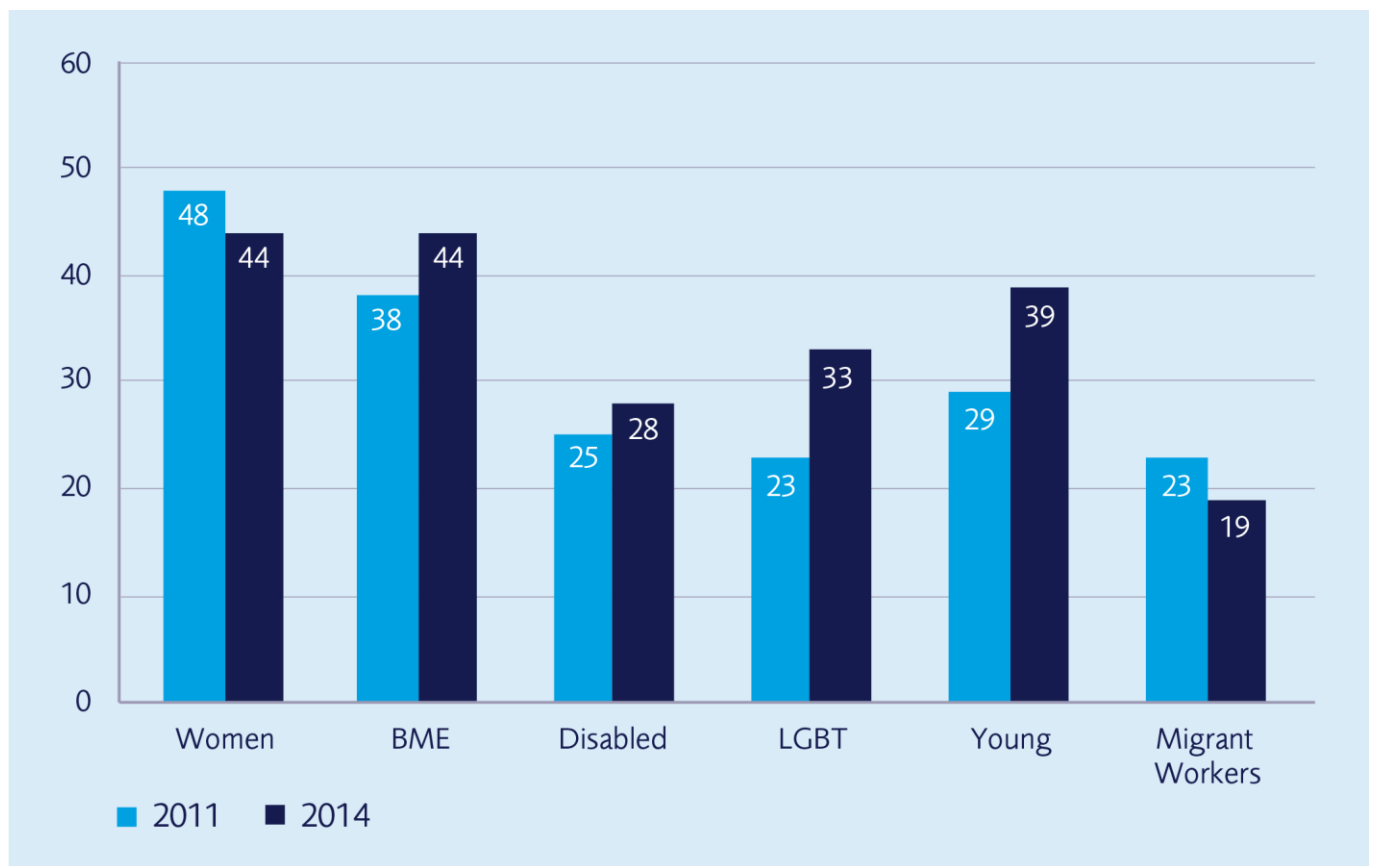
Unions taking action to recruit from different groups (%)



Encouraging participation

The proportion of unions that have undertaken specific activities to encourage women to become lay reps or branch officers has contracted slightly since the last audit. However, women, along with BME members, are the most likely to be given specific encouragement or support to become active within the union.

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

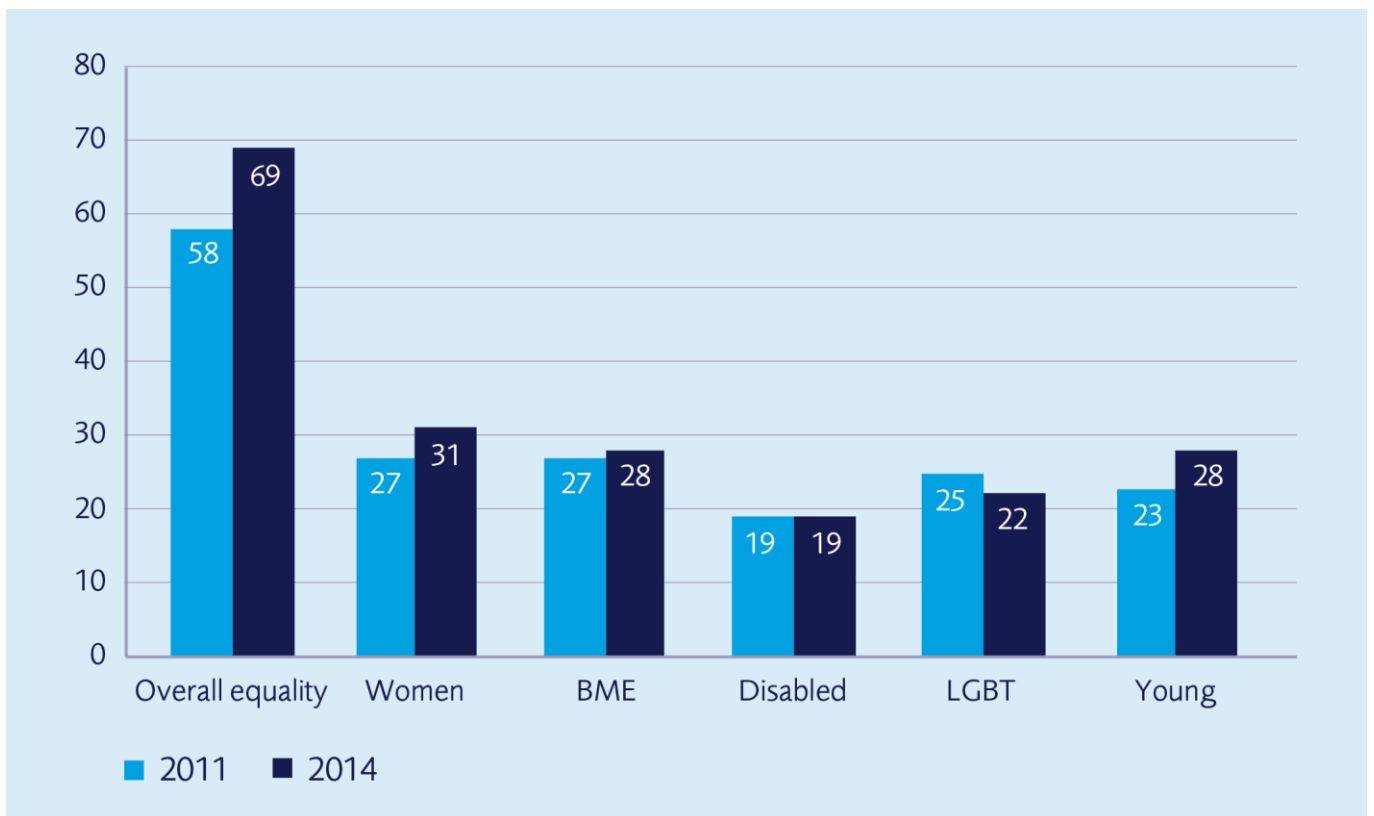


Women's officers

Thirty one per cent of unions employ staff at national level with specific responsibility for women. However, there has been a substantial rise in the proportion of women's officers who have other responsibilities besides women. This is the case in nearly three-quarters of the unions (73 per cent) with national women's officers.

Larger unions were asked if they employed any equality staff at regional, group or sectoral level. The proportion of unions with women's officers at this level has fallen from 20 per cent to 14 per cent in the last three years. As with national staff, the vast majority have other responsibilities besides women.

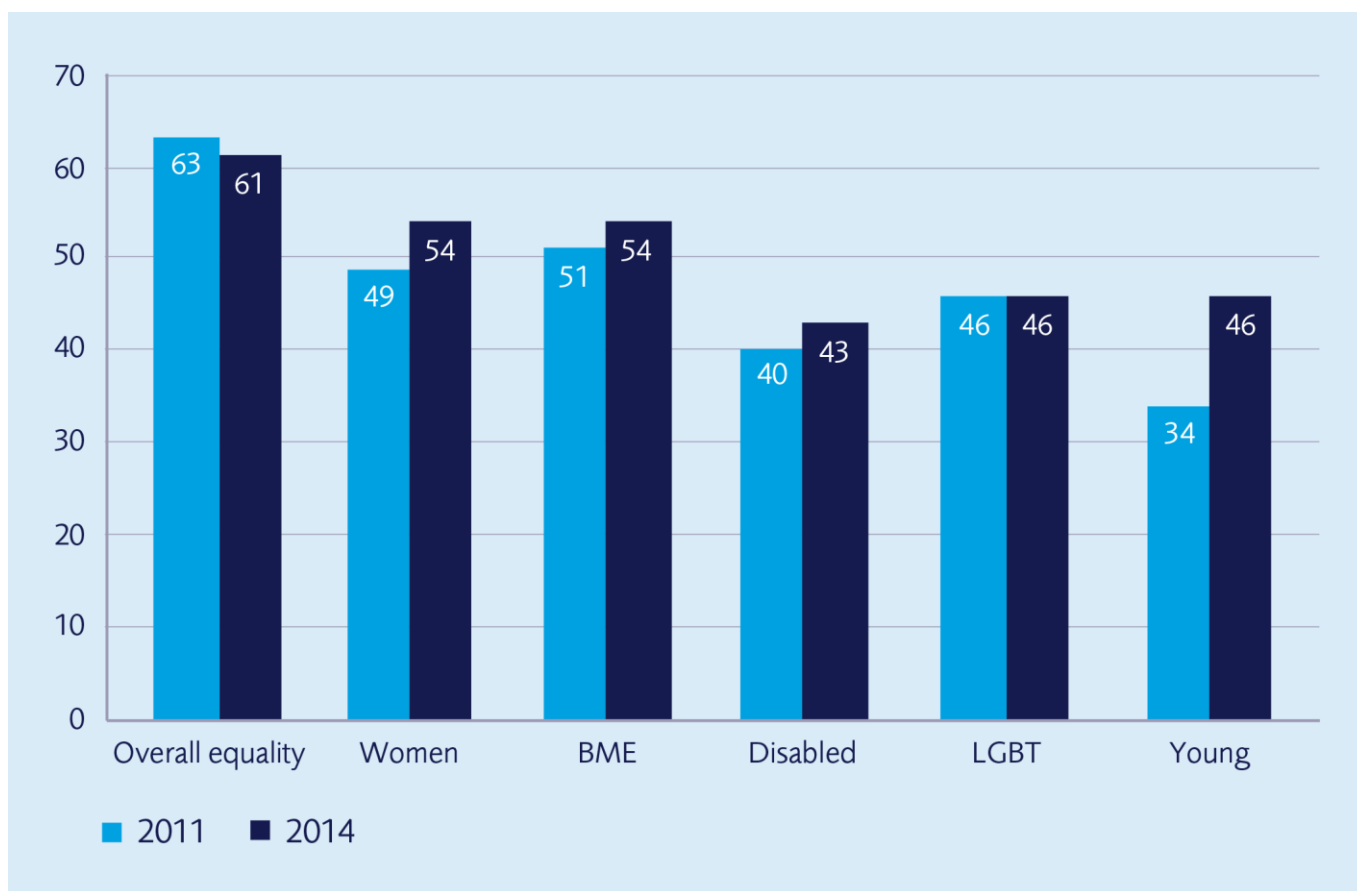
Unions employing equality officers at national level (%)



Women's committees

The larger unions were asked whether they have a national women's committee or similar body. Over half of them said they have one. Four-fifths of union members are in a union with a national women's committee or similar body.

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



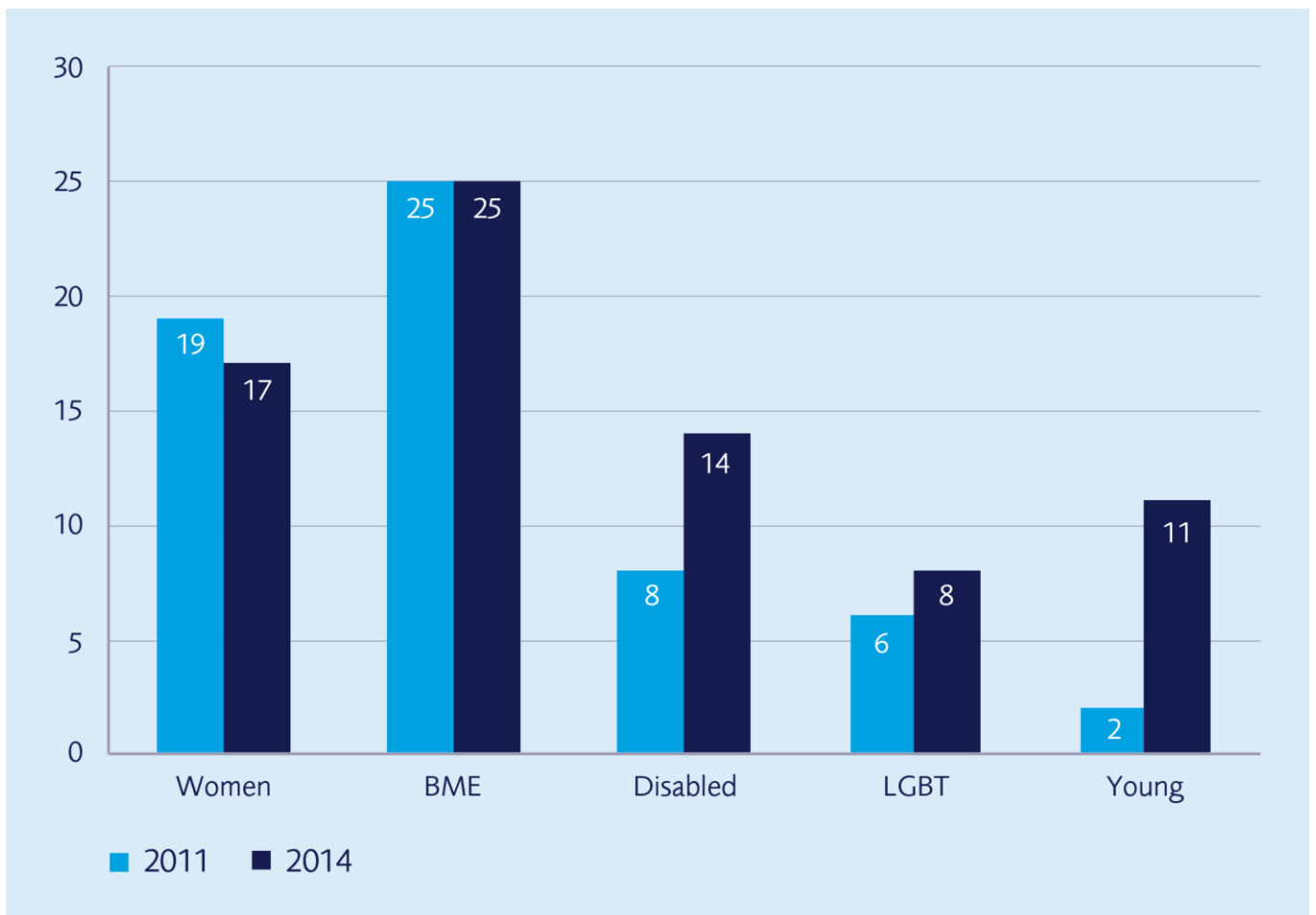
Reserved seats

Seventeen per cent of unions have reserved seats for women on their national executive. However, as this includes the three largest unions, the proportion of union members in a union with reserved seats for women is 61 per cent. The unions with such seats are: CWU, GMB, PCS, UNISON and Unite.

A significant change is that five of the largest unions have reserved seats for women on their branch committees compared with just one in 2011. The five are: CWU, GMB, PCS, UNISON and Unite. They account for 67 per cent of union members.

It is notable that there was a significant decline in the proportion of unions saying they had a rule on sending young members to the TUC Women’s Conference – just 7 per cent of unions said they have such a rule compared to 14 per cent in 2011. In 2013, TUC monitoring showed that just 8 per cent of delegates to the TUC Women’s Conference were under 35.

Unions with reserved seats on national executive (%)

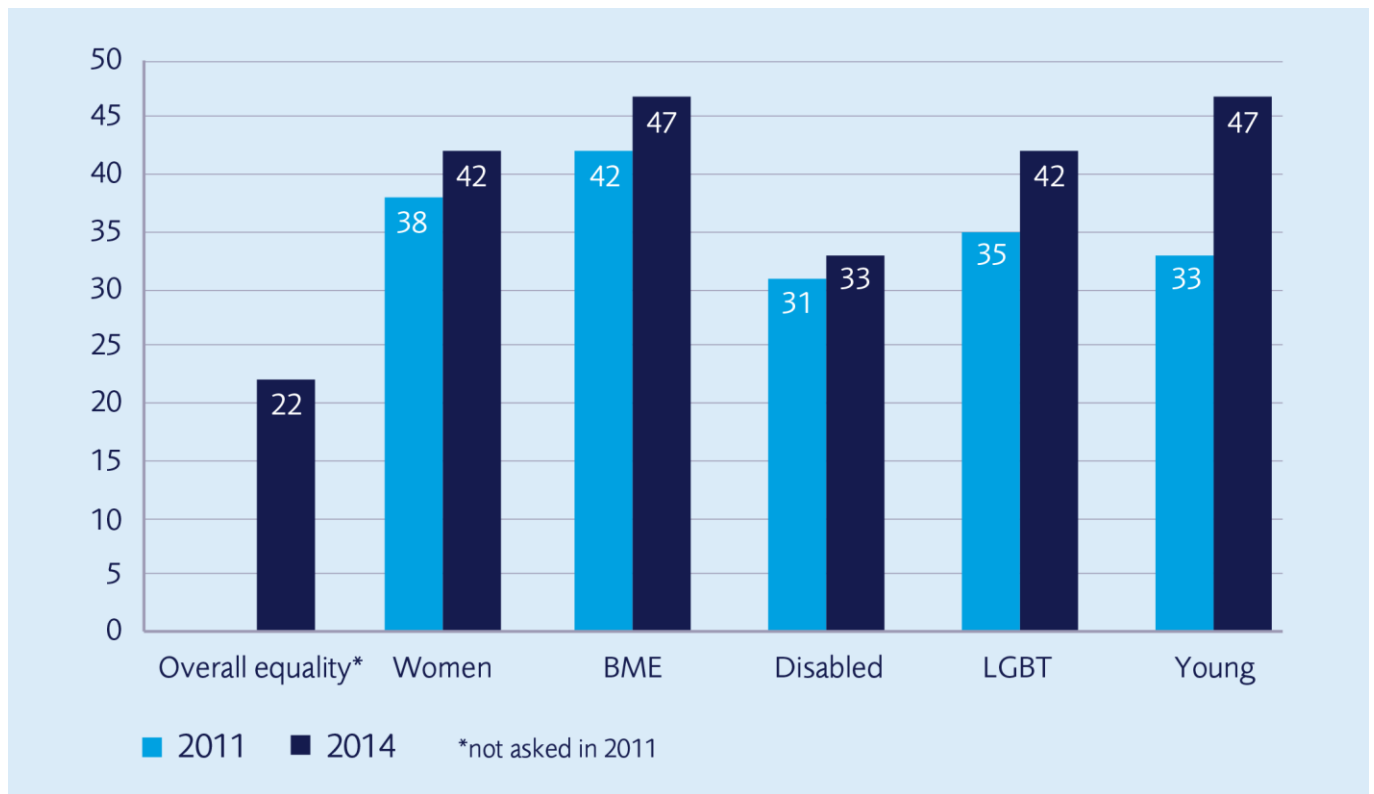


Women's conferences

Forty two per cent of unions hold a women's conference or similar event at national level. This is up slightly from 38 per cent in 2011. Two thirds of union members are in a union with a national women's conference or similar event.

There has been a more significant rise in the number of larger unions holding events for women members at regional or local level. Half of unions now hold such events up from 40 per cent in 2011.

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



Trade union training

There has been a general decline in training targeted at women. The proportion that provides some women-only courses has fallen since 2011. However, more unions are taking action to encourage women to participate in their general education and training – 53 per cent, up from 40 per cent in 2011. More unions are monitoring the take up of their training and education services by gender too – 64 per cent compared to 49 per cent in 2011.

Larger unions providing targeted training and education (%)

