



Our Union, Our Voice!

The TUC Young Workers Organising Strategy

Introduction

Congress 2014 carried unanimously, a motion submitted by the TUC Young Workers Conference calling on the General Council to develop a young workers organising strategy (YWOS). The motion called for the creation of a strategy that ‘will be developed by the young members alongside the Organising Department, which seeks to recruit and organise workers specifically in casualised workplaces...’ and also called for the development and training of young activists.

The motion reflected a concern about low union membership and density amongst young workers. The 2013 Labour Force Survey found that union density amongst workers aged 16-24 was just 7.7 per cent and that this was the only age group in which union density had declined over the previous twelve months.

This decline reflects a general trend in which the proportion of union members aged under-35 has declined. In 1995, one in three trade union members was under 35 but by 2013 this had fallen to one in five.

One of the main reasons for low levels of union density amongst young workers is their relative over representation in elementary jobs and sectors of the economy where union density is low.

Analysis by the Work Foundation has found that the number of young people in ‘elementary jobs is greater than it has ever been. The share of young men in such jobs increased from 14 per cent in 1993 to 25 per cent in 2011 and amongst young women the increase was even greater, rising from 7 to 21 per cent over the same period.

In 2012 there were 500,000 young people employed in accommodation and food services, a sector in which union density was just 3.5 per cent. Almost one million young people worked in wholesale and retail where density was 12 per cent and almost a quarter of a million worked in manufacturing where less than one in five workers were in a union.

The 2011 WERS survey revealed that not only does the movement have an ageing membership, but that our reps base is getting older too. In 1991 the average age of a union activist was 40; by 2007 this had risen to 45. In 1991, one in five union activists were under 30 but by 2007 just one in ten were. For senior union reps, defined as those that negotiate with employers, the average age was 49 - up from 42 in 1980. Just one per cent of senior reps were under 30, nine per cent were aged 30 - 40 and over half were aged 50 plus.

Developing the Strategy

As called for in the Congress motion, the strategy set out in this paper has been developed in consultation with affiliates and in particular, the young workers sections of individual unions.

In February 2015, the TUC Executive agreed a paper which set out the structure and potential content for the strategy and at the same time a consultation note was agreed by the TUC Young Workers Forum and circulated to unions.

By the closing date of February 27th, 2015 responses to the consultation had been received from GMB, MU, SERTUC Young Members Network, Unison and USDAW. The comments received have been incorporated into the strategy without specific reference to individual respondents.

The TUC YWOS will include work and activities across five specific work areas;

- Research
- Building union capacity
- Supporting union campaigns
- Developing the TUC Young Workers Forum
- Reaching out to young workers in non-unionised workplaces and sectors

It is foreseen that the strategy will run and evolve over time with regular updates on progress against the key objectives provided to the TUC Young Workers Forum, the TUC Executive and General Council.

Research

Outcomes: deepen our understanding of young people and work; inform union approaches to organising young workers; improve support for young activists

In recent years the TUC has supplemented information on union membership amongst young workers from surveys such as WERS (Workplace Employment Relations Survey) and the LFS (Labour Force Survey) with work involving focus groups of young people discussing their knowledge of trade unions and their thoughts and experiences on the world of work. The clear message from all of these studies has been that amongst young workers there is a lack of knowledge of what unions are, do and as a result of this how joining one might be beneficial to them.

The most recent focus groups organised by the TUC were held in December 2013 to inform the work on the potential gateway to union membership identified in the TUC Campaign Plan. These focus groups, rather than seeking to understand attitudes to unions instead focussed on experiences of work and

specifically sought to understand what young workers do when faced with a problem.

The main findings from these groups were that when faced with a problem at work, young workers are most likely to either put up with the problem or leave. Where they were inclined to pursue an issue, they were likely to consult the company, a trusted older adult or the Internet for initial advice and support. Once again these focus groups confirmed low levels of awareness of trade unions and a lack of understanding about what they are and do.

The development of the TUC Young Workers Organising Strategy presents the opportunity to investigate further the attitudes to work, employment and trade unionism of young workers. This might be taken forward at some point in the future by further focus groups, but in the short term by reviewing previous research and potentially commissioning fresh research into one or two key areas and utilising Work Smart user data.

Proposed actions:

Further research on:

- Young people and the labour market
- Current union strategies on organising young workers
- Understanding attitudes to work and dispute resolution in the workplace by young workers. This might focus on particular sectors including those referred to in the Congress motion.
- Understanding push and pull factors in relation to young workers and unions; including further work on developing a gateway model that would appeal to young workers with low levels of awareness of unions.
- Understanding the attitude of existing young members to activism in social movements generally with an emphasis on identifying any barriers to trade union activism.
- Understanding what would make engagement in union activism more attractive and practical.

Building union capacity

Outcomes: Support to unions in developing new and existing young workers structures; develop new and existing reps and activists; promote best practice; support the development of strategic approaches to organising young workers.

Over recent years TUC affiliates have continued the trend of developing youth structures within their respective unions. This trend was identified in the most recent TUC Equality Report, which found that nearly half of unions have set up young members forums or networks and half hold national young members conferences.

The survey also found that four unions have reserved young member seats on their Executive committees and six have rules on reserved seats for young members on conference delegations.

Whilst there has been an increase in the number of unions who gather information on the age profile of their members and activists, there is limited evidence of young workers structures informing the approach that unions take in organising young workers. This is not to say that such activity doesn't exist, rather it is un-reported and therefore such best practice as there is can't be promoted across the movement.

The Equality Audit also found that young members are generally under represented relative to their proportion amongst workplace reps, branch officers, conference delegations and on union Executive committees.

Proposed actions:

- The TUC to provide strategic support to at least three unions with existing or emerging young workers organising strategies.
- The TUC to consult with unions on using existing TUC and union platforms to develop a Reps Mentoring scheme. This would be run with TUC Education and would have a specific emphasis on recruiting women and BAME union members.
- The TUC to host an annual meeting of officers and activists responsible for Young Workers structures in unions.
- Run a second TUC Young Leaders Programme with potential expand into a Young Leaders Summer School.
- The TUC Young Workers Forum to have a standing agenda item on allowing unions to report on workplace organising or union initiatives focussed on young workers.

Supporting union campaigns

Outcomes: Provide support to and promote union organising campaigns focussed on young workers.

Any genuinely relevant strategy to organise young workers should include a focus on organising campaigns focussed on young workers.

Over the last year there have been a number of relatively high profiles campaigns in a number of sectors that have either intentionally or otherwise focussed on young workers. In the entertainment sector, BECTU's campaign for union recognition and a Living Wage at Ritzy Cinema received a significant amount of publicity. BFAWU have focussed on low pay and zero hours contracts in fast food

and Unite, GMB, CWU and USDAW have run campaigns either targeted at or relating to issues impacting particularly on young workers.

The development of the YWOS presents the opportunity for the TUC to increase the direct support it provides to unions who are actively organising young workers. Informal discussions with a number of private sector unions have suggested that there may be value in looking at a TUC initiative post-election to better support the efforts of these unions to reach out to young workers in the private service sector in particular. As part of the implementation of the YWOS, the TUC office will facilitate further discussions with private sector unions to flesh out what form this support could take, perhaps as part of a broader initiative to promote unions in the private sector.

Proposed action:

- Consult with unions
- Increased utilisation of TUC supported social media platforms
- TUC to promote young activists, wherever possible in all publications
- Develop the Young Workers section of the TUC website to be a showcase for union campaigns targeted at young workers

Developing the TUC Young Workers Forum

Outcomes: Run TUC YWF priority campaigns; Use TUC Young Workers Month 2015 to promote union campaigns; support regional TUC YW networks

Over the last two years, the TUC Young Workers Forum has been placed on a campaign footing and has started a process whereby it becomes a voice for all young workers regardless of whether they are members of a union or not.

To support this process the Forum has introduced three new initiatives; Open Forums linked to scheduled meetings of the YWF on issues of concern to young workers; Priority Campaigns chosen by delegates to the Young Workers Conference and an annual TUC Young Workers Month.

Proposed actions:

- Formally launch the strategy at the 2015 YWC which will be themed ‘Our Challenge: Organise Young Workers’
- Use the YWF priority Campaigns to support union organising campaigns focussed on young workers
- Link the Open Forums to on the ground campaign actions, again linked to the YWF Priority campaigns and union organising supported by the TUC Campaigns Officer
- Support the development and activity of young workers structures in TUC regions

Reach out to young workers in non-unionised workplaces and sectors

Outcomes: make it easier for young people, particularly those in precarious work in low density sectors to join unions and access information and resources on rights at work; demonstrate trade union affinity with issues that young people care about

The TUC Campaign Plan contained a commitment to investigate the possibility of creating a gateway into union membership for young workers. Since the publication of the plan initial research into potential models for such a 'gateway' has taken place and further work will be undertaken during 2015.

As a result of this initial research phase the TUC will launch an enhanced version of the Work Smart website before Easter. Work Smart receives approximately 1 million visitors each year and the new version will allow the TUC to ask users of the site for information - such as name, address, email, sector and workplace - in return for access to a new resources section. The information obtained will inform the work on development of the potential 'gateway'. There is the opportunity to develop a set of publicity materials for the new Work Smart site that will appeal directly to young workers in low density sectors.

The TUC signed a 'Campaign Partnership' with the NUS in 2013 which has facilitated joint work on a number of issues such as pay, unpaid internships, apprenticeships and youth unemployment. The NUS has supported some of the initial research work on the Gateway and there remains the potential to work with NUS on an enhancement of its NUS Extra Card that would provide NUS Extra members with a range of support in relation to employ net rights and work related issues.

The development of the TUC YWF Priority Campaigns have provided the opportunity for the TUC to demonstrate the relevance of unions to young workers on issues not directly related to work such as housing and political education. For example, during the last TUC Young Workers Month the TUC published, in partnership with Generation Rent, the results of a survey of young union members on housing which received 2,500 responses.

Building on the housing survey and identifying other non-industrial non industrial campaigns (for example the removal of housing benefit) will provide the TUC and unions with the chance to demonstrate affinity with the broad range of issues that young people face.

Proposed actions:

- Target new Work Smart site and resources at young workers in low density sectors
- Review and refresh the partnership Agreement with NUS and develop a joint initiative on opening up information about unions and rights to students in full or part time work
- Identify and run at least two non industrial campaigns on issues that young people care about.
- Provide support and information on unions and employment rights for young workers non-conventional employment relationships such as freelancers and interns.