

Young 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 young workers. Please see the full report for more detailed commentary and examples of good practice from unions.

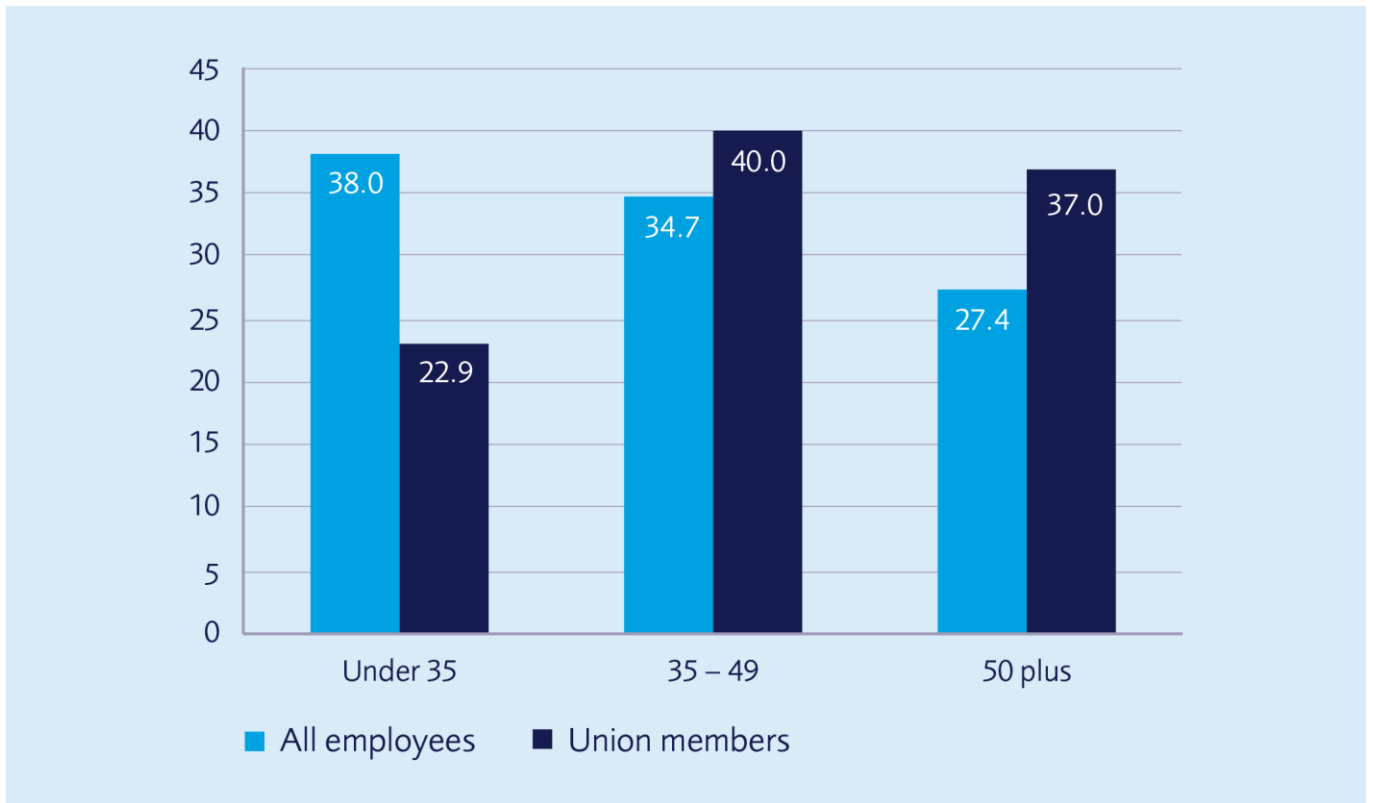
Young workers' representation in unions

Official statistics on the labour market and trade union membership show that union membership is ageing faster than the overall workforce and young workers are significantly under-represented – just 23 per cent of union members are under 35 years old compared to 38 per cent of all employees.

The Audit asked unions what campaigns, structures, training etc. they have in place to improve representation and participation of young workers. Unions used their own definition of young worker. The cut off varied from 25 to 35 years old.

Sixteen unions (44 per cent of respondents) provided data on the representation and participation of young workers in their membership and structures. They were: ASLEF, ATL, CSP, CWU, Nautilus, NGSU, NUJ, PCS, Prospect, RMT, TSSA, UCU, UNISON, Unite and Usdaw. The proportion of their membership categorised as young varied from 0.5 per cent to 34 per cent. These percentages partly depend on the age cut off used by the union as well as the workforce profile in the sectors and occupations in which the unions organise.

Representation of different age groups in union membership (%)



In all the unions that provided data, young members were under-represented relative to the proportion in membership among union learning reps and health and safety reps and on the union's national executive.

In most unions, they were also under-represented among branch officers and equality reps and on TUC Congress delegations.

In three-quarters of unions young members were under-represented among union conference delegates.

TUC monitoring data showed that at Congress 2013, 7.8 per cent of delegates were aged under 35.

Improving representation in membership and participation

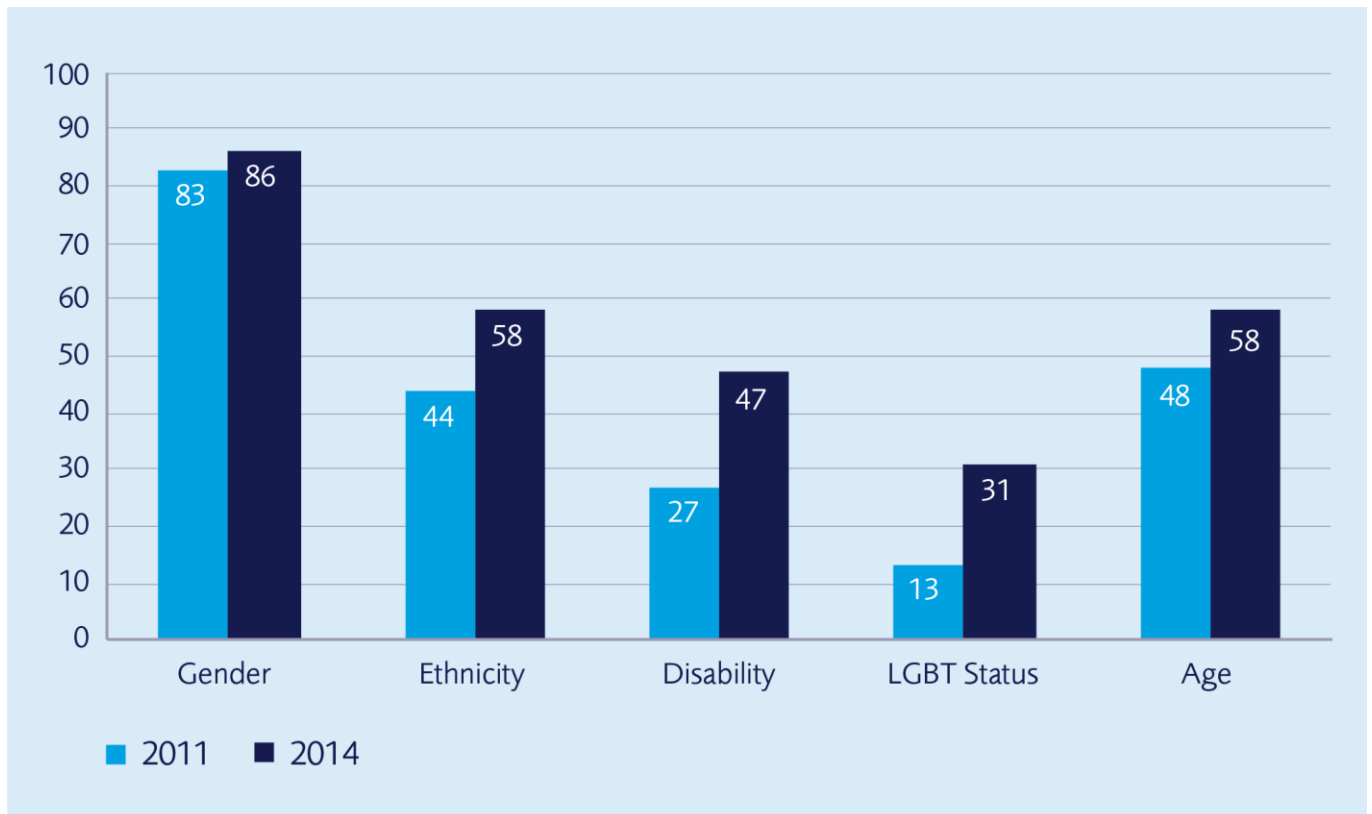
Monitoring

Monitoring is often seen as the essential starting point for any organisation that is serious about improving representation and tackling barriers to participation and progression. Without monitoring it is hard to understand the nature and extent of the under-representation and it is impossible to assess whether actions have led to improvements over time.

More unions are monitoring the proportion of young workers in membership – 58 per cent now do so, up from 48 per cent in 2011 when the last similar audit was carried out. As monitoring is more common among the larger unions, 83 per cent of union members are asked about their age for union membership records.

About half of unions (47 per cent) also monitor the age profile of their shop stewards, workplace reps and branch officers. Slightly fewer monitor the age profile of their conference delegates (44 per cent) and their national executive (42 per cent).

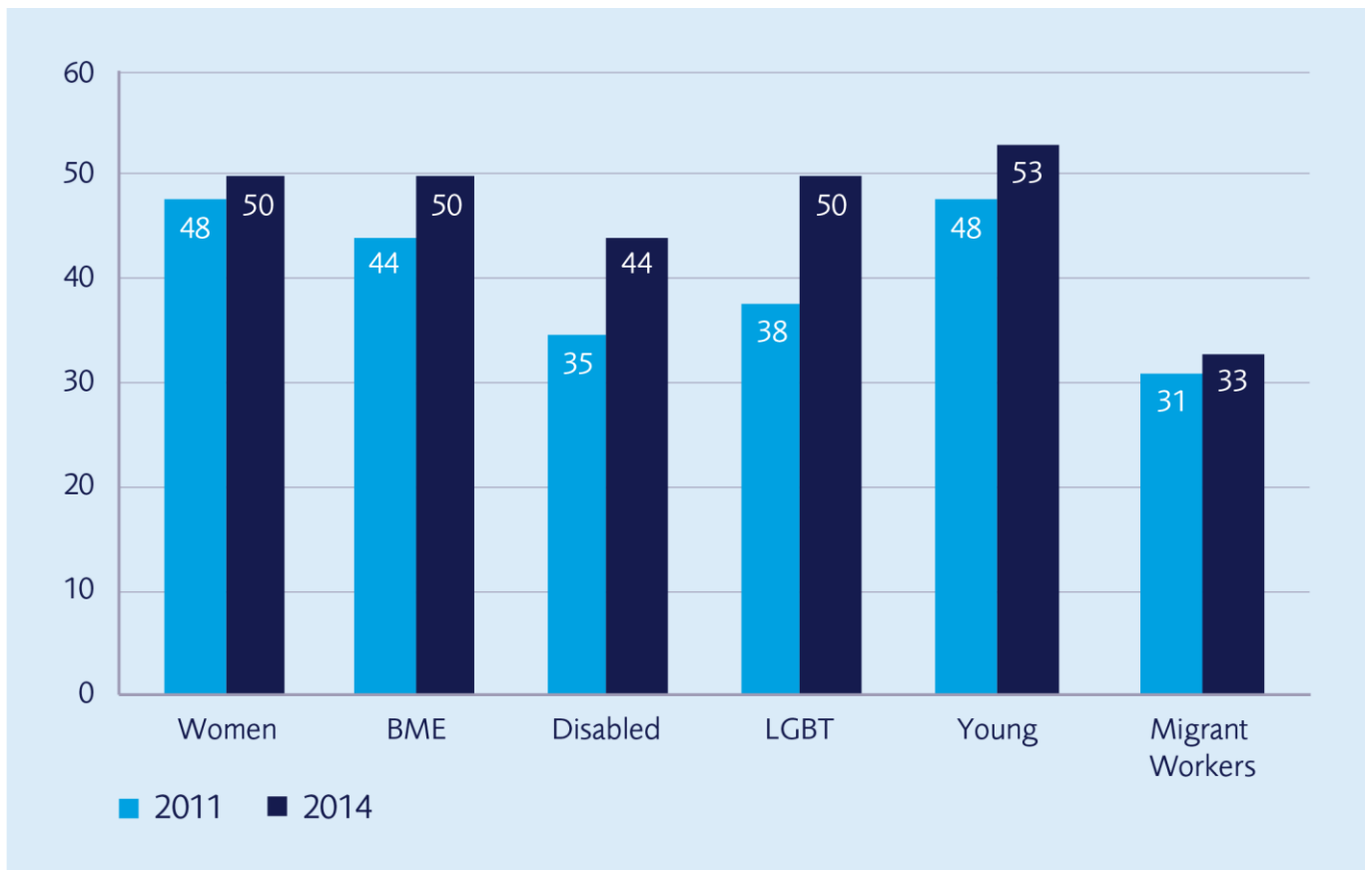
Unions monitoring membership by protected characteristic (%)



Targeted recruitment

The audit shows that young people are now the most likely of the under-represented groups to be targeted for membership, with just over half of unions (53 per cent) carrying out specific activities or campaigns to recruit young workers. (The full audit report includes examples of some of these activities.)

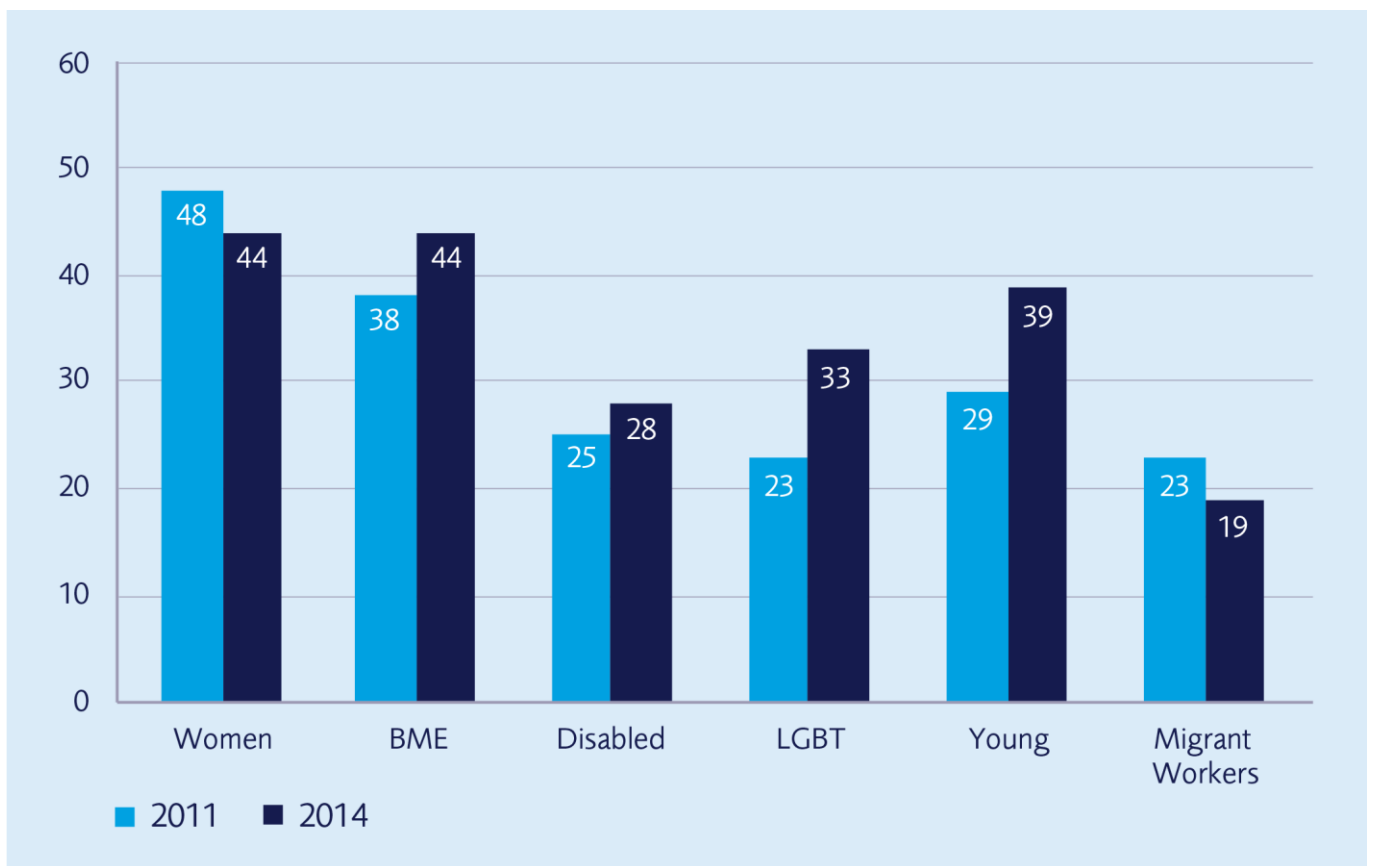
Unions taking action to recruit from different groups (%)



Encouraging participation

Thirty nine per cent of unions are not taking positive action to encourage more young members to become reps or branch officials, compared to 29 per cent in 2011.

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



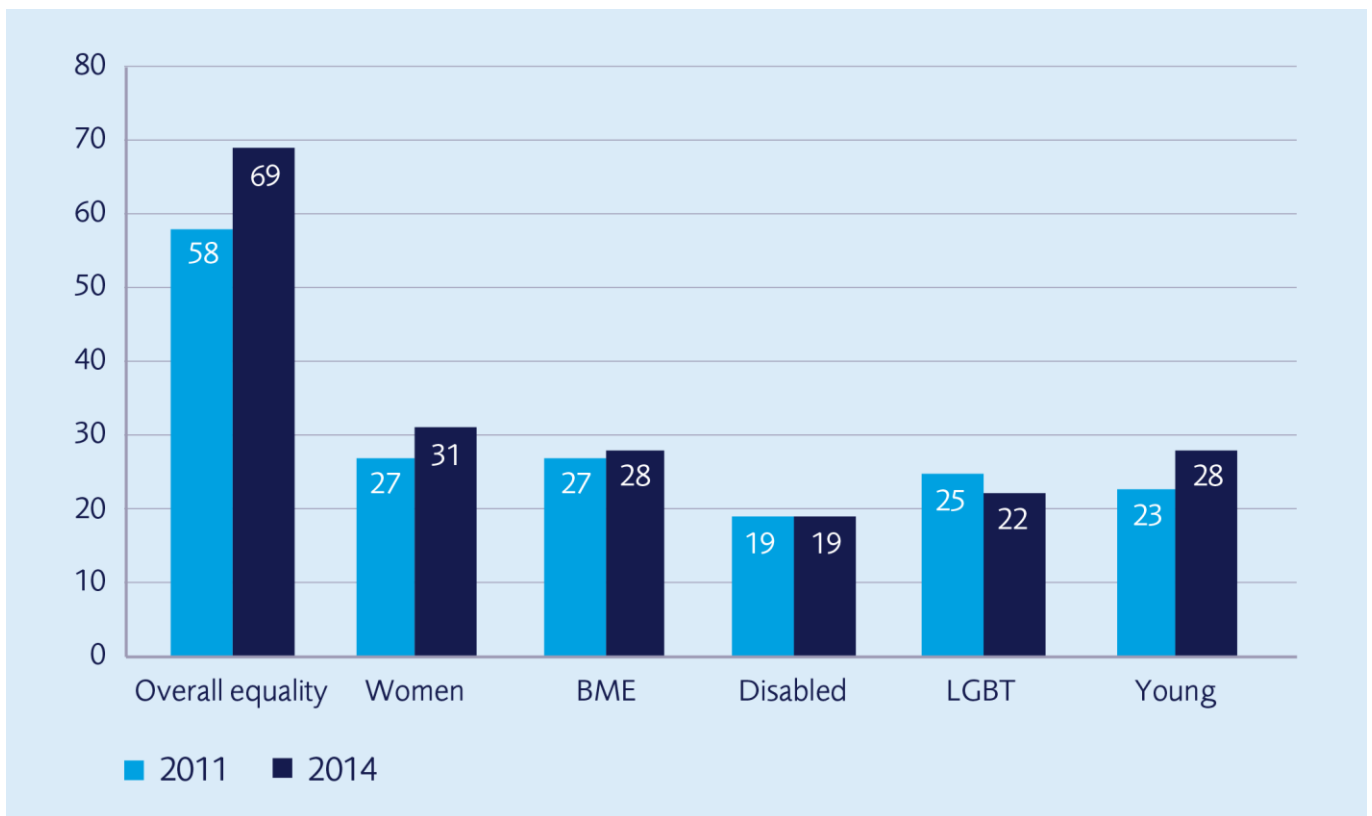
Officers with responsibility for young workers

Twenty eight per cent of unions employ staff at national level with specific responsibility for young members, up from 23 per cent in 2011.

However, 90 per cent of these officers have other responsibilities, whereas in 2011, 64 per cent had other responsibilities besides young members.

Larger unions were asked if they employed any equality staff at regional, group or sectoral level. The proportion of unions with officers for young members at this level has only risen slightly from 17 per cent in 2011 to 18 per cent now. As with national staff, the vast majority have other responsibilities besides young members.

Unions employing officers at national level (%)

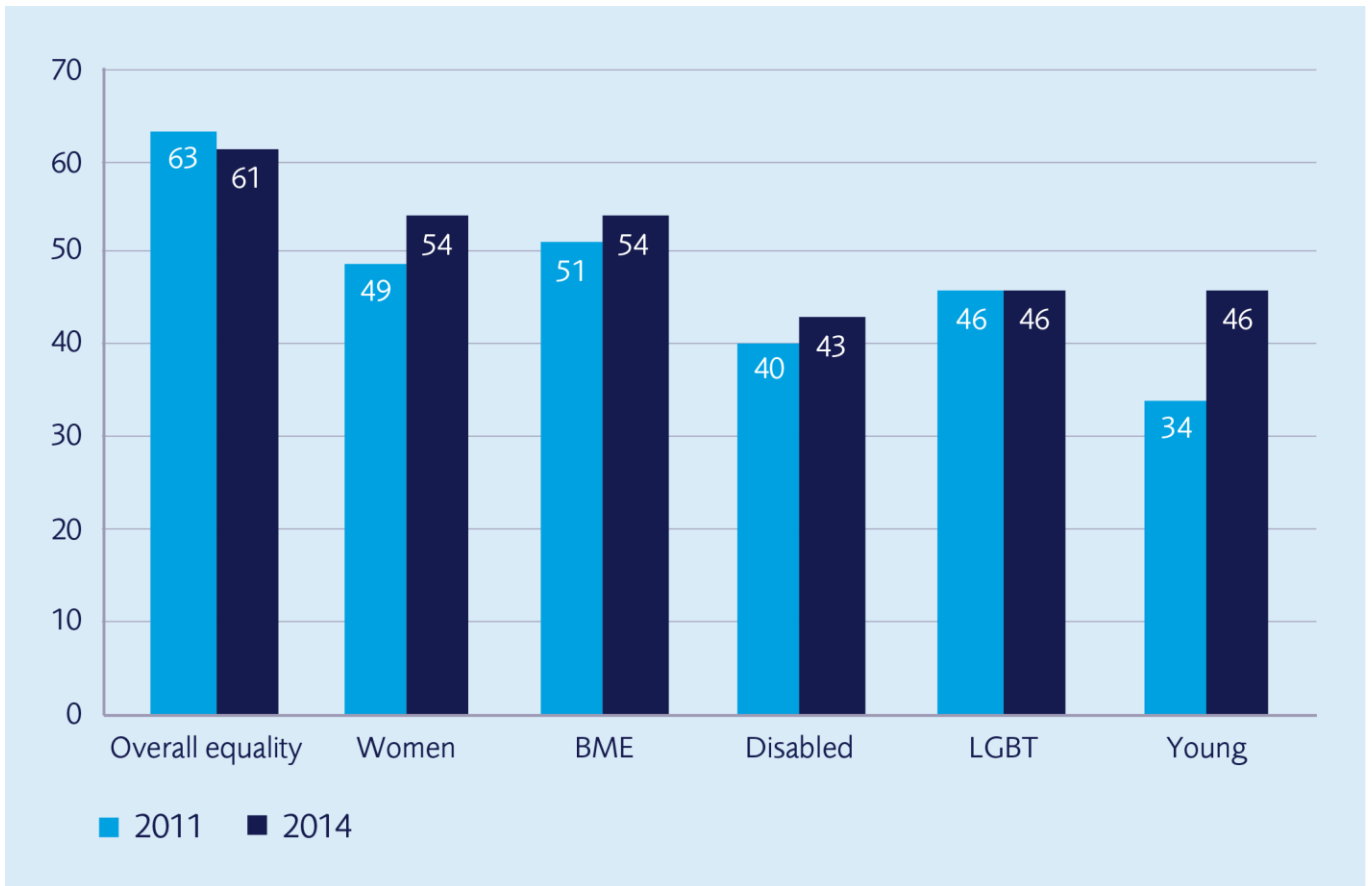


Young members' committees

There has been a significant growth in the number of unions with young members' committees at national level – 46 per cent of unions now have one compared to 34 per cent three years ago.

The unions with such a body are: ATL, Bectu, CWU, Equity, NASUWT, Nautilus, NUT, PCS, RMT, TSSA, UNISON, Unite and Usdaw. They account for 80 per cent of union members.

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

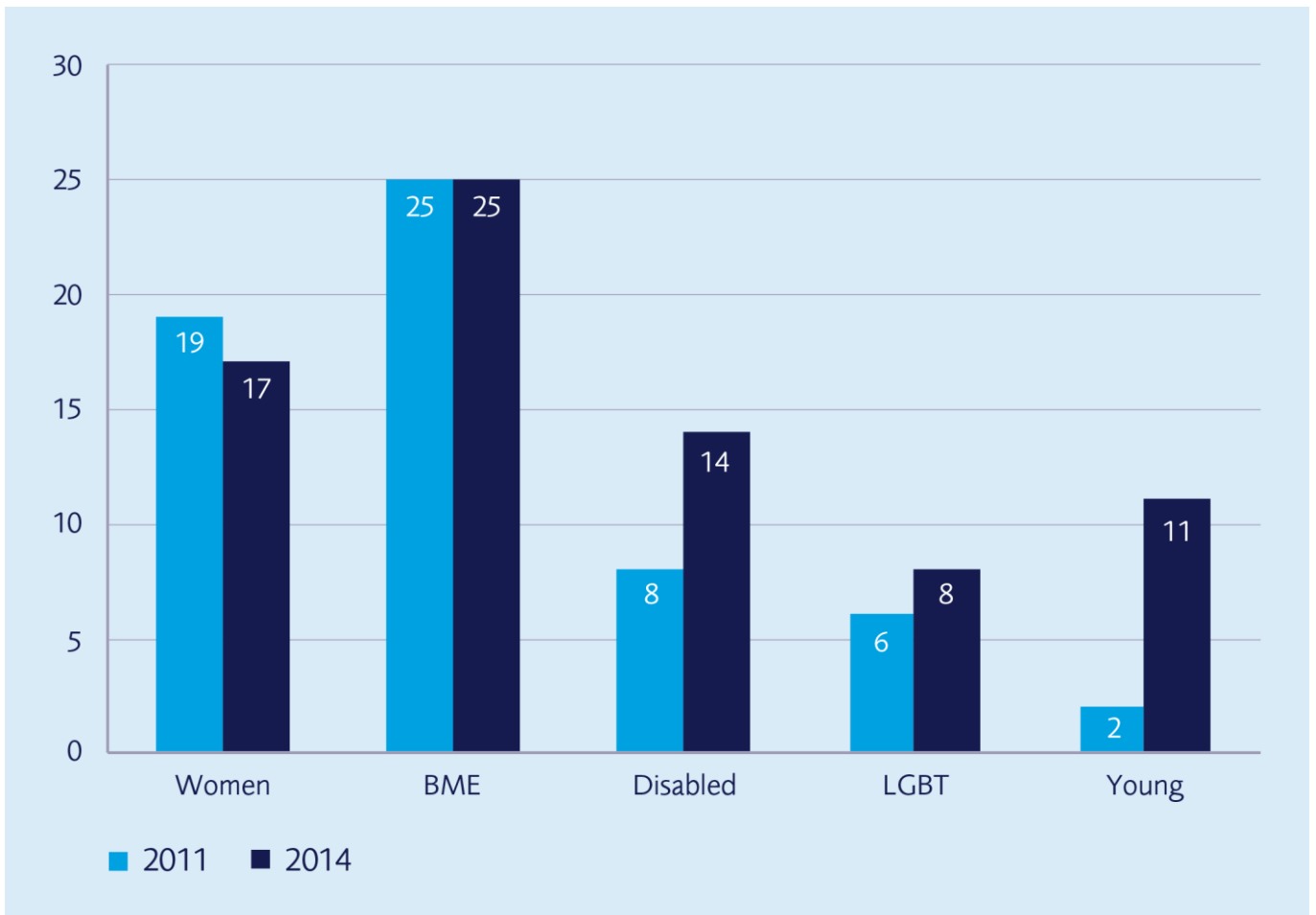


Reserved seats

Only a small minority of unions use reserved seats to improve representation of particular groups on their senior decision-making bodies and conferences. But a number of the largest unions do have such seats.

There has been a notable rise in the number of unions with reserved seats for young members on their national executive – from 2 per cent in 2011 to 11 per cent in 2014. The unions with such seats are: Equity, NASS, UNISON and Unite. They account for about half of union members (48 per cent).

Unions with reserved seats on national executive (%)



There was also a rise in the number of unions with reserved seats for young members on conference delegations. Six unions (17 per cent) now have such seats. They were: ATL, Equity, NASS, NASUWT, TSSA and UNISON. They account for about a third of union members (32 per cent).

Slightly fewer unions (14 per cent) have a rule on representation of young members on their TUC Congress delegations, but this is up from 8 per cent three years ago.

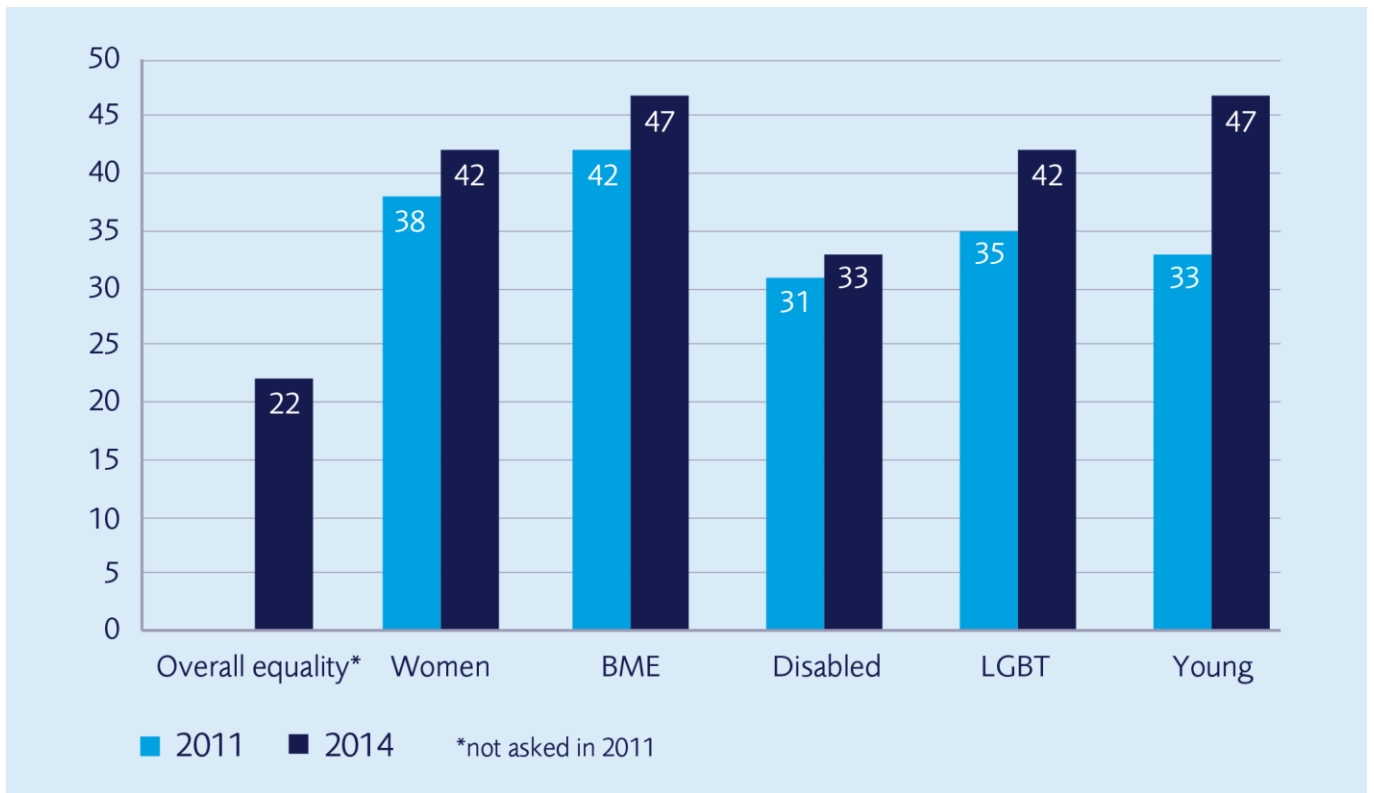
Larger unions were also asked if they had a rule on the make-up of their delegations to the TUC equality conferences. It is notable that there was a decline in the proportion of unions saying they had a rule on sending young members to the TUC Women’s Conference – just 7 per cent of unions said they 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.

Young workers’ conferences

The proportion of unions holding young workers’ conferences or seminars at national level has increased from a third in 2011 to nearly a half in 2014.

Among the larger unions, there has also been an increase in the number holding events for young workers at regional or local level – 46 per cent up from 40 per cent in 2011.

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



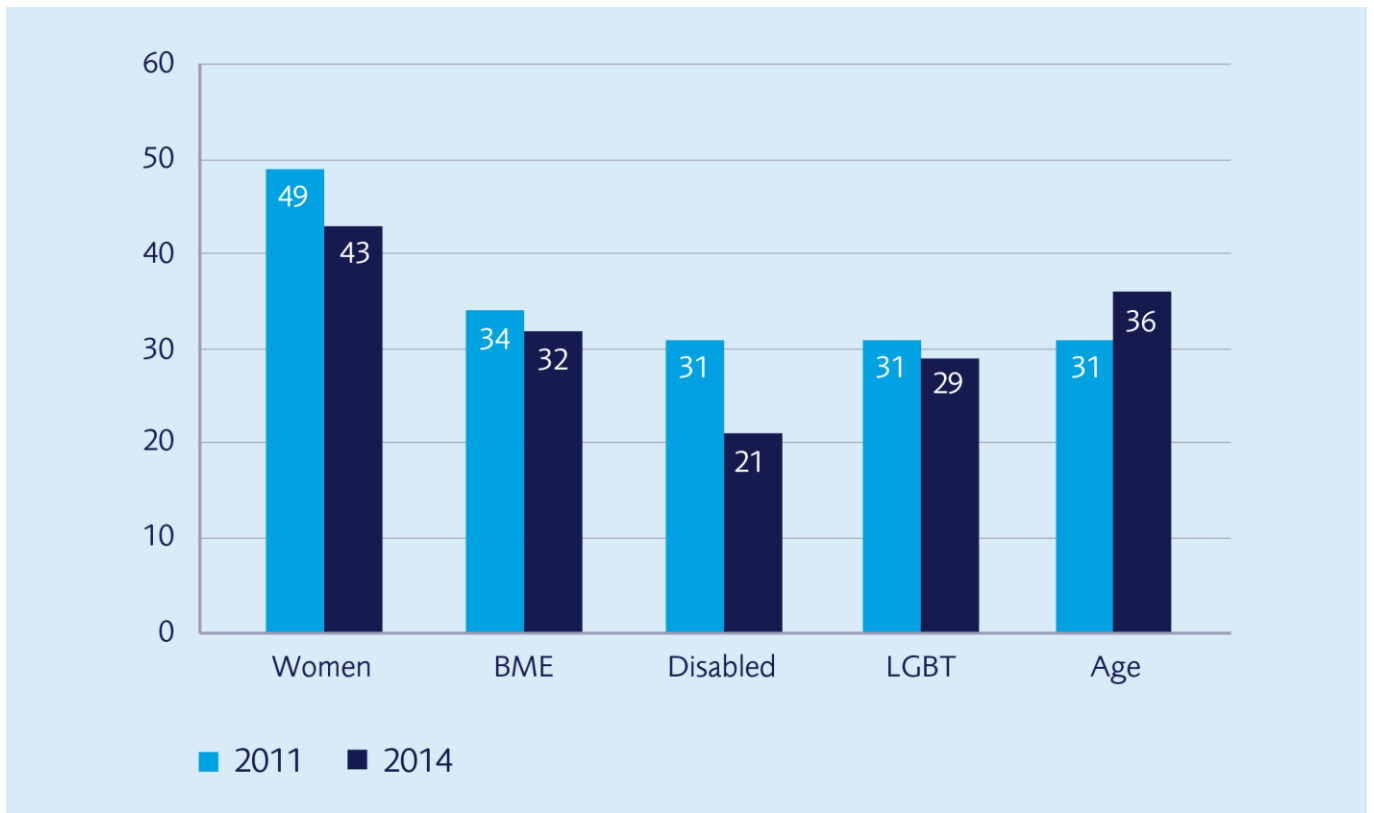
Trade union training

There has been a general decline in the number of unions running training courses targeted at particular groups, but despite this, more unions are developing courses specifically for young members.

There has also been an increase in the number of unions encouraging young members to participate in their general education and training – 42 per cent now do so, up from 31 per cent in 2011.

In addition, a majority of unions now monitor the take up of their courses by different age groups – 57 per cent now do so, compared to 34 per cent in 2011.

Larger unions providing targeted training and education (%)



Improving representation in membership and participation

The TUC Equality Audit provides a regular snapshot of unions' progress in improving representation and participation within unions. It provides an opportunity for unions to benchmark their progress against others and to share good practice.

In the decade since the first audit was carried out, a number of unions have developed their own internal processes and action plans to address under-representation – 56 per cent now have an action plan in place compared to 27 per cent in 2011.

When discussing the findings of the 2014 audit in relation to young workers, the TUC Young Workers' Forum may wish to consider making recommendations for future action that could help inform unions' efforts to address the under-representation of young workers. These recommendations could then be disseminated by the TUC.