

# 2023

## YEAR OF BLACK WORKERS

Establishing legacy to  
generate change

### About UNISON

UNISON is the UK's largest public service trade union with 1.3 million members. Our members work in the public services, and for private contractors providing public services including in the essential utilities. They include frontline staff and managers working full or part time in local authorities, the NHS, the police service, colleges and schools, the electricity, gas and water industries, transport, and the voluntary sector.

In UNISON, 'Black' – with a capital B – is used to indicate people with a shared history. 'Black' is used in a broad political and inclusive sense to describe people in the UK who have suffered from colonialism and enslavement in the past and continue to experience racism and diminished opportunities today. We believe that our members are victims of institutional racism, according to the definition in the Macpherson report.

### How UNISON Black members organise

We estimate UNISON has 185,000 Black members, mainly in health and local government services, with significant numbers working in social care and schools. Many deliver frontline services, and many are low paid.

Over the past two years we have seen the disproportionate impact of Black workers and communities being hit particularly hard during the pandemic. Working on the front line, exposed to Covid-19, in insecure jobs.

A \*survey conducted by The Runnymede Trust, *Over Exposed and Under-Protected – The Devastating Impact of Covid-19 on Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in Great Britain*, highlighted that a number of groups, including black people, are at a greater risk from Covid-19, given that they are “*more likely to be working in key worker roles, less likely to be protected with PPE and more likely to live in multigenerational, overcrowded housing, so much less able to self-isolate and shield*”. Black workers are particularly likely to be classed as key workers (34%) and workers from Black African backgrounds are more likely to be working outside of their home (41%), increasing their exposure to Covid-19.

All this layered on top of a history of institutional racism, which the Westminster Government denies. This is the time to take forward UNISON's vital work on race equality and make this the 'Year of Black Workers' to celebrate the unions long history of achievements, to come up with practical steps for change, and to focus our minds on challenging

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racism in the workplace. It is only by having those broader conversations together about race that is deep rooted in society, that racism can be eradicated.

It is imperative that we look at the role that discrimination has in the workplace. An independent \*review by Baroness McGregor-Smith in 2017 found that:

- In terms of opportunities for progression, 29% of Black Caribbean employees reported feeling that they have been overlooked for promotion because of their ethnicity
- In terms of top management positions, the Black and Black British group did particularly poorly over the period between 2007 and 2012, with the number of Black/Black British people in top management positions decreasing by 42%
- 30% of those from a Black background reported experiencing or witnessing racial harassment or bullying from managers in the last five years.

Similarly, a \*chapter of an independent report by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, *Employment, fairness at work, and enterprise*, explores ethnic minority progress at work, highlight that:

- The employment rate for black people (69%) is significantly lower than their White British and Indian counterparts
- Black African people have the highest rates of youth employment at 26%
- The pre-pandemic employment rate for black people was 69% in 2019 with the pandemic likely exacerbating this
- The ethnicity pay gap figure sits at 8% less for Black Africans on average than their White British counterparts
- Black employees had a higher rate of experiencing discrimination at 29%.

UNISON's Year of Black Workers campaign is underpinned by the following Mission Statement: **"Establishing Legacy to Generate Change"**. Through this mission statement two main themes will be focused on: **Legacy** and **Change as an overarching strategic intent of UNISON**. These themes will foreground specific work and campaigns the NBMC is already involved in and reflective of our different sector partners, alongside intended outcomes for branches and regions as a focal point for change and, thus, legacy created.

When thinking about **Legacy** the NBMC will be looking at the work we are undertaking around Equality and Equity through lived experience in UNISON as a learning organisation.

**The main sectors that would be in partnership with the NBMC are as follows:**

- Community
- Health
- Higher Education
- Local Government
- Police and Justice

\*Links to 'Review' and 'Chapter' are on page 4.

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- Water/Environment/Transport
- Energy.

### **All Self-Organised Groups, forum, and members**

- Women
- LGBT+
- Disabled
- Young Forum
- Retired members.

### **The main legacy campaign strands that the NBMC hope this project will develop within these sectors/SOG's are as follows:**

- The Ethnicity Pay Gap
- Ending the Hostile Environment
- Challenging the Police Crime Sentencing and Court Act alongside the Discriminatory Stop and Search
- Modern Day Slavery
- Teaching Black History as part of the national curriculum across UK, just as the Wales Government commissioned report, and implement the recommendations
- The Race Discrimination Protocol
- The TUC Anti-Racist Manifesto
- The Workplace Race Equality Standards.

### **The main changes the NBMC would like to see this project generate across sectors and within the union are as follows:**

**Policy Changes-** The development/improvement to existing collective bargaining, organising and recruitment policies that: Demonstrate and acknowledge the unfair and discriminatory experiences of Black workers by calling for legislative changes to practices in the workplace and have a focus on increasing the recruitment and retention of Black workers to the union.

**Process and Protocols Changes-** the development of new toolkits/ protocols or improving existing ones to meet the changing needs of Black Workers considering findings from surveys such as the WRES, the Ethnicity Pay Gap.

**Practice and Procedures Changes-** A review of old and existing workplace practices and procedures that have not changed alongside policy changes.

Consistent, standardised reporting, monitoring, and sharing of good practice to identify where employers may need support to implement changes.

### **Considering this, the NBMC through this project, hopes that:**

**Branches would** - provide the necessary support, training, and opportunity for Black members to become involved in the Year of the Black Worker, by initiating and supporting activities to mark this year that branches would encourage 'buy in' by employers, particularly across health and local government sectors. The national office to encourage and support the development and ongoing work of Black Self-Organised groups. Branches to develop, recruitment drives aimed at recruiting Black workers to join the union and become active at the local level and in the community.

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**Regions would** release statements endorsing the YOBW 2023 and pledge support to branches set the YOBW 2023 as a priority on their work plan/ agenda. Regions to continue their support for branches and Black self-organised groups to conduct planned activities to mark this year, by way of appropriate resources. Communication will be vital to feed into the wider/ national level work plan to support the NBMC YOBW 2023 by changing disempowering practices and policies.

Thus, prevent Black Reps from engaging fully in wider union activities due to issues such as facility time, or lack of opportunity to progress to Branch Chair/Branch Secretary or other senior roles across and within the union.

### **Resources to support the NEC work on Tackling Structural Racism in the Workplace**

- Negotiating for race equality in the workplace
- Training for reps and activists to track and challenge racism
- Tackling the ethnicity pay gap
- Supporting Black workers self-organisation
- To translate these campaign aims into public affairs actions, we will produce a “Campaign Toolkit” comprising of:
  - Context Analysis
  - Resources for members
  - Write to your MPs templates
  - Social media content suggestions.

The toolkit will work as a tool to galvanise grassroots support and empower members to contact legislators, as well as calling for mandatory ethnicity pay gap reporting.

### **Links**

#### **Survey:**

[shorturl.at/vzJPY](https://shorturl.at/vzJPY)

#### **Review:**

[shorturl.at/dmCJM](https://shorturl.at/dmCJM)

#### **Chapter:**

[shorturl.at/dqCDI](https://shorturl.at/dqCDI)