

# UNISON SECamb Branch – report to AGM 25<sup>th</sup> February 2019

## Equality

Having been inspired to activism by attending the National Ambulance LGBT Network National Conference in Manchester in late August last year, I joined Stella Quentin-Steele in her role as Equality Officer for our branch in September. We both recognised that the struggles that those with protected characteristics face, whilst often very different, also have a great deal in common. Stella came to the role with experience and a passion for ensuring equality for those with disabilities in the workplace. I had been inspired to play a part in addressing the inequalities that still exist despite the vastly improved social landscape from that of the times in which I ‘came out’ over twenty years ago. Whilst much ground has indeed been gained, the suicide rate amongst trans people and young gay men, for example, remains unacceptably higher than the rest of the population. This represents, perhaps, the tip of the iceberg of the mental health and other issues that are prevalent in these groups.

In the last six months, whilst both contending personal struggles of our own, we have worked on defining what our role entails, and how we might best achieve this. We realised that equality is something that pervades all that we do as a union and is therefore *everyone’s* responsibility. It therefore follows that our role is to ensure that equality remains high on the agenda within the branch, to be a point of contact for advice on best practice in this area and to increase visibility of equality issues whilst forging links with those within the networks that exist within the Service, whose aims very much coincide with our own.

There are also two other aspects to our work that we have identified. One is supporting individual cases where inequality has played a role. The other is identifying disproportional representation in groups, which may be symptomatic of inequality, and attempting to identify the causes and therefore work towards remedies.

Although we initially split the role on a geographical basis, we are now offering to take on more specific roles, with Stella proposing to take on the role of Disability Officer, whilst I am proposing to take on that of Equalities Officer. This would play to both of our strengths and interests, whilst also enabling us to continue the teamworking that we have begun. There are many common themes that we wish to contribute to, e.g. mental health which are applicable to all staff working within the environments that we do.

I think that the time that we have spent ‘finding our feet’ within this role has been necessary and worthwhile. We have gained a greater understanding of the nature of equality issues and are keen to continue putting these increasingly to practical application. Our aim is therefore to work more closely with the current staff networks (Aspire, Enable and Pride in SECamb) and those which may be established in the future, both in terms of increasing UNISON’s contribution, presence, influence and visibility within them, and learning from the experience of those within the networks to bring this back into the branch.

Tony Faraway

Taking on the D&E role made sense as I'd previously been responsible in a large operational organisation for policy on how prisoners were treated on account of disability, faith and gender characteristics. As I joined SECAMB late in 2017 it has taken a year to find my feet and start to go forward on D&E. I started by getting to a Unison SE Region Equality conference and meeting D&E reps from other branches. Another D&E rep shared an Accessibility Passport which can be used by any member of staff with a disability to help focus them and their managers on wellbeing and any adjustments needed to help ensure that.

I also attended the annual D&E coordinator training. Suggested ways forward:

- Look for available data – from branch membership and from the employer - and use this to identify issues for campaigns
- find good practice and share this with branch activists
- identify issues coming through from casework and provide information and good practice to assist branch reps
- identify themes and issues from casework which are relevant to staff to inform campaigns with potential to help both staff and employer.

Sharing ideas with Tony has helped identify other ways to go forward:

- join and get active in SECAMB staff networks
- network with activists from other SECAMB unions to share good practice

Going forward, we are growing as a team with Pip Griffin who is working on women's issues for the branch and our membership. Greater coverage in terms of greater expertise in D&E issues can only help our members and stewards.

Everything I have learned so far shows that mental health issues and wellbeing are important for our members and indeed for many SECAMB members of staff. To that end we hope to work with SECAMB in whatever ways are open to us: through networks, with other unions and more broadly with management.

Looking forward to going forward positively and proactively with D&E issues in the next year.

Stella Quentin-Steele