

Young workers and trade unions in the UK



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Introduction and methods



Public and
Commercial
Services Union

- Analysis of the development of the Young Members' Network (YMN) within the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS)
- Part of wider research project evaluating union organising in PCS
- Documentary analysis, non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews (n=61)
- Problems of definition? PCS YMN open to members aged 27 and under



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Young and unionised?



Public and Commercial Services Union

- Shister (1953) Young workers have greater propensity to unionise than older workers
- Subsequently been proposed that young workers are actually less likely to join a trade union (Bain and Elias, 1985; Blanchflower 2007)
- Trade union density by age group, 2000-2010 (Archur, 2011)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
16 to 19	5.4	5.3	4.9	5.2	3.9	3.3	5.2	3.8	4.3	4.1	4.0
20 to 24	14.3	14.3	13.5	14.0	13.5	13.2	13.1	12.9	12.2	11.8	12.0
25 to 29	23.1	22.6	22.0	22.4	22.7	21.8	21.9	19.6	20.2	20.9	19.6

- Total union density = 26.6%



Reasons for low membership amongst young people?



- Amongst existing literature, there are three separate, but not mutually exclusive, reasons
 - 1) Changing labour markets
 - 2) Union inefficiencies
 - 3) Attitudinal problems
- These will now be explored in the context of public services and the responses of the PCS



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Changing labour markets



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- Attacking terms and conditions (CSCS dispute, pensions)
- Privatisation and contracting out (especially the use of agency workers)
- Greater emphasis on work intensification, deskilling
- Determination to cut jobs
- Recruitment freeze
- No longer a “job for life”
- Civil service increasingly precarious (Standing, 2009; 2011)
- Civil service union density = 67%

- 2002: Average age of PCS member/civil servant = 41
- 2011: Average age of PCS member/civil servant = 46



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Union inefficiencies?



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- Development of YMN (2004) reflected wider change in attitude to organising young workers across union movement
- Democratic structure to represent young members politically and socially
- Charter and constitution outline aims of YMN
- Advisory committees
- Branch Young Members' Officer role issues
- Lack of encouragement?
- Limited opportunities for progression? (opt-in)



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Attitude



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- Explaining the benefits of unions to young workers
- Importance of Young Members' Charter
- Youth specific guidance on national campaigns (e.g. pensions)
- Celebrities to support campaigns
- National Young Trade Unionist Week
- National Young Members' Forum
- Increasing media awareness
- Unions into schools programme
- Links with external groups (Workers Beer Company, NUS, other unions)



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Conclusions



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- Union has attempted to deal with main reasons for low membership and changed union image through creating an agenda young people can relate to
- Won TUC Award for Youth 2009, 2010, 2011
- However, 'changes at the policy and rhetorical level do not necessarily result in changes at the interface with members and potential members' (Haynes et al, 2005: 99)
- Changes in external environment affecting union growth, e.g. restructuring and recruitment freeze mean the civil service becoming increasingly precarious (Standing, 2009) and soon may be lack of young workers to organise, despite best efforts of PCS



Any questions?