



More about the Women's Conference and what to expect

GMB Southern region has held an annual Women's Conference for the last 3 years. This conference will be the largest ever.

The conference is aimed at:

- Women members who are not active in the union but are considering getting more involved
- Women members who are new activists but want to build their experience and knowledge
- Women activists who want to build a network of other women activists in the region
- Women who want to know more about how the union works and how to take part in GMB structures e.g. Congress, GMB equality networks, Regional Council/Committee
- Women who want to learn how to take an issue forward in their workplace and to push their employer to take action
- Women who want to get more workers in their workplace to join and get involved in the union
- Women who want to run campaigns about issues affecting women in the workplace
- Women who want to represent the union within the Labour Party

Over the years the agenda has included, for example:

Speakers

- Paul Maloney, Regional Secretary GMB Southern Region
- Dawn Butler MP Shadow Minister for Women and Equalities
- Shami Chakrabarti (Previous Director of Liberty) Shadow Attorney General for England and Wales
- Rachel Holmes Author of Eleanor Marx, A Life
- Rehana Azam, GMB National Secretary Public Services

Workshops

- How does the GMB Work – hearing from women already active in the union explaining their role
- How to get more involved in the GMB
- What can we learn from disputes run by women throughout history to inform campaigning today?
- Trade Union Bill and how will it impact women workers
- Assertiveness
- Public Speaking
- How do I go to GMB Congress?

Action Planning

The last session of the weekend always looks at what delegates have learnt and how they will use that to get more involved in the union.

Previous delegates have had some amazing successes.

Women's Conference delegates have gone on to:

- Become a workplace rep for the first time
- Represent their first GMB member at a grievance or disciplinary
- Complete their workplace representative training
- Become a senior rep and convenor
- Run campaigns in their workplace from menopause, pay disputes, redundancies and many more
- Become a branch secretary
- Attend GMB Congress and speak from the rostrum for the first time
- Join the Labour Party and got involved
- Stand for Councillor
- Attend Labour Party Conference and speak from the rostrum
- Become a regional organiser
- Sit on regional council and regional committee

The following are comments from women who have attended women's conference in the past:

"After the women's conference I represented a colleague in my workplace and managed to stop them being sacked. The member was really happy with the help and I felt really good being able to help my colleague at a tough time. I am looking forward to doing this more"

"Had it not been for the (women's) conference hosted in November 2017, I never would of stepped out of my comfort zone to attend GMB Congress in June which also led to me speaking at Labour Party Women's Conference last week"

"My branch have been trying to get me to congress unsuccessfully for 4 Years, but the exercise and workshops at women's conference last November was my turning point and for that I owe all I have done in GMB to the conference"

"The women's conference had a big impact on me. Since the conference I have recruited more members into our branch, assisted with a pay ballot in my workplace, helped with campaign to bring cleaners back in house and learned practical skills about how to administer the branch e.g. minute taking."

"It's (attending women's conference) given me confidence to tackle problems in the workplace (racism) bullying"

"Attending the Women's conference was a huge stepping stone for me, in finding out how to get involved in GMB, how I can empower other people and support campaigns. Following on from attending the women's conference I was able to get an insight to the Regional Equality Forum, to then become a member of the REF and aid and develop other aspects such as the Southern Race Network."

I found that there were other women who could relate to personal life circumstances like myself and being in that space gives a sense of unity and empowerment.

I was then introduced to the Labour Party and became a member. As a result I have attended and engaged in talks with Dawn Butler. I was privileged to have had a 15 minutes lone conversation with her about how she will encourage the Labour Party to tackle issues such as “Windrush” and more empowerment for women.

I would never have thought I would of been interested in politics however as I have attended more political events and engaged with MP’s and Councillors, I feel as though this is something of interest to me and would like to see where this could go. “

The women’s conference empowered me in the following ways:

- I have pushed for Show Racism The Red Card to be promoted in my workplace
- Menopause to be recognised as a workplace issue
- Currently campaigning for Black History Month to be reinstated in the Borough
- Push the employer to recognise stress at an early stage
- I have given advice to help with stress and sign post members to organisations
- To feel confident in speaking to people regardless of status
- Support Wandsworth Labour in elections
- Motivate branch representatives
- Support and encourage representatives

I must say that I found many elements of last year’s woman’s conference both engaging and highly informative. As an first timer to conference, it helped develop my confidence and delivering a short speech, although terrifying, was a fantastic boost to my ego. I never thought I would ever be able to address a large number of people in that way.