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A first-time delegate's experience at group conference

HMPO member Paul Heckles reflects on his first time at Home Office group conference in Brighton.

This year I decided to become a union rep. With the cost-of-living crisis taking hold it became apparent there was a need, now more than ever, to fight our corner. I was lucky to be able to attend my first group conference as a trainee delegate. I was able to put names to faces and meet an amazing group of people who, like me, are fighting for a safe and fair workplace.

What surprised me is that the role is not as easy as I thought it would be; the hard work and dedication that goes into making the union successful is staggering, even after witnessing some of this first-hand. To think that this is done frequently, on a volunteer basis, is astounding. When listening to the motions presented at conference it became clear that it isn't just my local office "getting things a bit wrong," but up and down the country there are systematic failings across the board that, if the union was not active, would go unchecked and unchallenged.

Coming away from conference I was inspired by the speeches I heard, the knowledge I've gained and the people that give their heart and soul to the union. Conference showed me that there is more to the union than sitting in a meeting with managers. I have come away with passion and excitement to try and get more people involved, either by encouraging them to become a rep, a member, an advocate, or by attending events like the Durham Miners' Gala.

I am just starting out on my journey as a trade union rep and I am looking forward to the challenges, the knowledge I will learn and the skills I will develop. I am proud to be a part of the PCS voice - here's to it getting louder.

Paul Heckles, HMPO Northern Branch