

3rd August 2021

Attention: Frances O’Grady, TUC General Secretary

Re: SWU’s Application to join the TUC

Dear Frances

We write as **General Secretary, Chair and National Executive** of the Social Workers Union (SWU), to express our deep disappointment at the rejection of SWU’s application to be affiliated to the wider ‘congress’ of Unions. The Social Work profession works within all aspects of the margins of society and has a proud history of advocating and campaigning including most recently highlighting how COVID-19 has demonstrated the structural inequalities particularly following the austerity of the past 10 years, all of this activity being in the best traditions of the work undertaken by trades unions.

We note that your current rules were written prior to the pandemic and state:

The General Council shall have full power to accept or reject any such application for affiliation and the General Council shall in addition have full power at any time to terminate the affiliation of any organisation which in the opinion of the General Council does not fully satisfy the requirements of affiliation for the time being.

And Rule Objects include:

To promote equality for all and to eliminate all forms of harassment, prejudice and unfair discrimination, both within its own structures and through all its activities,

The enquires made have suggested that SWU has been declined on the basis of insufficient factual information from industrial interest unions (UNITE, UNISON and GMB) and; as it seems, prejudice. We are particularly concerned that another union (UNISON) would highlight to you concerns about

our union 'poaching' members without even discussing this with us or an opportunity to develop a discussion. As you will know, UNISON refused to meet prior to our application and this significant allegation really needs more clarity **(please see letter attached from our A&R Team)**.

We also understand that UNITE, GMB and UNISON have expressed concerns about our independence and working relationship with British Association of Social Workers (BASW). Yes, at one time the two organisations were aligned together as ultimately BASW formed SWU in 2011. SWU can however assure that since the election of the SWU General Secretary, John McGowan in 2016 creating the complete Independence of SWU staff from BASW employment; the two organisations are separate organisations but work closely as you would expect on key social work issues **(please see letter from Paul Scholey highlighting our independence)**.

Given the vital importance of trade unionism, and the current on-going devastating consequences of COVID-19, especially for minorities and the least well-off that Social Work continues to support, and has supported throughout the staggering chronic cuts to vital social services, can we respectfully request that the present TUC rules and processes determining the rejection of membership be reviewed following the impact of COVID-19?

This would support clarification of any potential misinformation that has been offered in respect of SWU / or any other Union for that matter. From our perspective, enquires made would suggest that in the grounds for rejecting SWU's application there is a large element of *factual inaccuracy from UNITE, GMB and UNISON* which indeed could be viewed as prejudicial and therefore contrary to the objects of the TUC rule quoted above. In conclusion therefore, SWU would welcome the opportunity for further discussion and clarification, in light of the points we have made.

Meantime, as a certified independent Trade Union we will continue to strive in solidarity, collaboration, and mutual respect with all fellow trade unionists. SWU would ask that this letter is shared with the TUC National Executive as a complaint.

Sincerely

John McGowan - SWU General Secretary

Carys Phillips - SWU Chair

SWU National Executive Committee