

**2016 Higher Education Service Group Conference
Decisions**

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Motions

1. Don't Do A Clegg!

Carried

Conference has long stood against the tuition fee model in higher education which has been used to marketise our workplaces, eroding terms and conditions, whilst unfairly burdening millions of young people with extraordinary debt.

Conference notes that, as well as tuition fees being set to continue at £9,000 per year, and rise with inflation, the Tories intend to scrap the student maintenance grant in 2016, and replace it with a loan-based system. This will be a double whammy for students from poorer backgrounds, making it harder for them to access Higher Education to begin with, and then loading them with further debt if they do undertake a degree.

Conference was therefore heartened to see clear opposition to the tuition fee model form part of Jeremy Corbyn's Labour leadership campaign, a campaign which was notable for how many young people it engaged and galvanised.

The Shadow Minister for Higher Education, Gordon Marsden, has since said that scrapping tuition fees won't automatically become Labour Party policy, but will be subject to a policy review which does not rule out any options including the existing model.

This Conference sends a clear message – "don't do a Clegg!" Young people and our members in Higher Education have been betrayed before; it's time to stop the rot in politics and stand up for future generations and UNISON members.

Conference calls on the Higher Education Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Work with Labour Link to ensure the feeling of members in Higher Education is represented;
- 2) Write to all Labour MPs to reiterate the opposition of our members to the existing tuition fee model, including the proposed scrapping of student maintenance grants, and our clear wish to see free, fully funded education and defence against harmful market forces;

Provide branches with publicity highlighting problems the 'free market' tuition fee model introduces to our workplaces and provide thoughts on alternatives.

2. Voter Registration – Don't let Students lose their Voice

Carried

Conference notes the following:

- 1) That the previous coalition government passed the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, which made provision for Individual Electoral Registration (IER). This will replace the previous electoral registration system, whereby one person was responsible for registering the entire household.

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- 2) That the Tory government elected in May 2015 intends to pursue boundary changes, reducing the number of UK Parliamentary seats from 650 to 600. These boundary changes would favour the Tories.
- 3) That these boundary changes would be based on the number of registered voters in each constituency, as the intention is to make the number of voters similar in each constituency with the redrawn boundaries.

Conference is deeply concerned that the combination of IER and boundary changes will not only increase the likelihood of the Tories being permanently in government, with serious implications for UNISON members; it will also leave many young voters disenfranchised, as they are less likely to be registered to vote, and to vote, than older voters.

Conference is aware that, whereas voters could previously be registered at more than one address, they can now only be registered at one address. This affects students, many of whom may not realise the need to ensure they are registered to vote at their term address, rather than their permanent home address, as most national, local and European elections take place during term-time. Conference believes that Higher Education branches have a duty to engage with the student population.

Conference therefore calls on UNISON's Higher Education Executive to work with UNISON Labour Link and student unions to run a voter registration drive, targeted at students.

3. Defending Trade Union Rights in Higher Education

Carried

This conference notes:

- 1) The current political climate makes trade union activists more vulnerable to victimisation.
- 2) The Trade Union Bill being presented to parliament in autumn 2015 represents a significant attack on trade union rights.
- 3) That there is no longer a legal right for employees to be accompanied by a trade union representative at flexible working meetings.

This conference calls on the Higher Education Service group executive to:

- a) Organise a national campaign in Higher Education with the aim to:
 - i) Gain a voluntary agreement with the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) that Higher Education employers will not use agency staff in the event of strike action.
 - ii) Reach an agreement with Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) that trade union representatives will not be unfairly targeted or victimised for trade union activities.

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- iii) To Reach an agreement with Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) on the rights of employee's to be accompanied and represented at work that goes beyond the legal framework and the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration (ACAS) guidance. For example, to be able have a trade union representative at flexible working meetings.
- b) Report back to UNISON Higher Education conference 2017 with a national Higher Education strategy to help defend UNISON activists from victimisation at Higher Education institutions.

4. "Impact of Trade Union Bill on Higher Education"

Carried

Conference notes that the Trade Union Bill currently going through Parliament is the biggest attack on workers' rights and civil liberties in a generation. The headline requirement of a 50% turnout for a strike ballot is well known but there are other more insidious and pernicious sections that will fundamentally affect the way that Trade Unions and their activists will be able to function and represent their members. The aim of this Bill is clearly to undermine the trade union movement and its ability to represent its members.

The Trade Union Bill will have an impact on members working in higher education. Facility time is under threat in a way in which it has never been before and the lack of facility time will fundamentally alter the way in which we can represent our members and help keep workplaces safe.

The ability to strike will be severely restricted making it almost impossible to take lawful industrial action. Whilst the threshold requirements are well known, other restrictions are less publicised :

- 1) Ballot papers will require greater detail;
- 2) A rebalot will be required every four months;
- 3) Balloting will still be postal – no offer of secure electronic or workplace voting that unions have been requesting for many years and which was is felt to be secure enough for the London mayoral election;
- 4) The removal of the prohibition on agency workers to break strikes and these workers may face dismissal if they refuse to cross a picket line;
- 5) Names of pickets will have to be provided to the Police and employers and a supervisor identified wearing an armband who will need a letter from the General Secretary authorising the picket;
- 6) "Intimidation" is widely defined and the move from the civil to the criminal code could result in large fines for UNISON and/or an ASBO (anti-social behaviour order) issued against a picket
- 7) Payment of Union subs through DOCAS (Deduction of Contribution at Source) is also under threat.

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Even some Conservative MPs feel that this Bill has gone too far. Many employers have good working relationships with Trade Union representatives and acknowledge that this Bill will not improve industrial relations. The Scottish and Welsh Assemblies have stated that it should not apply in their respective countries.

Conference calls upon the Higher Education Service Group Executive to provide members with advice and guidance to persuade those who support the Bill that it should be withdrawn and to highlight the impact of the trade union bill on workers at UK Universities.

The SGE should encourage members to:

- a) Lobby MPs (member of parliament), AM's (Assembly Member), MSP's (Member of the Scottish Parliament), MEPs (Member of the European Parliament), Lords and encourage members to write to national and local newspapers, taking part in local phone-ins and other debates;
- b) Lobby local Councils to pass motions opposing the Bill;
- c) Encouraging employers to oppose the Bill through their employers organisations, in particular UCEA (Universities and Colleges Employers Association) ;
- d) Work collectively with other trade unions and civil society groups;
- e) Lobby organisations supplying agency workers, highlighting the difficulties they and their workers will face in trying to break strikes

5. Assessing the value of the Race Equality Charter Mark for Black staff and students in Public Services/Higher Education

Carried as Amended: 5.1

Conference, the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) piloted a Race Equality Charter Mark with the aim to inspire a strategic approach to making cultural and systemic changes that will make a real difference to Black staff and students.

The Charter covered:

- a) Professional and support staff
- b) Academic staff
- c) Student attainment, diversity of the curriculum and progression of students into academia

Conference, twenty-one higher education institutions took part in the pilot of the Race Equality Charter Mark and the ECU has recently completed the panels for the first round of applications. The result of the trial was released in the week commencing 10 August 2015.

An evaluation of the Race Equality Charter pilot is now taking place and after the evaluation of the trial has been completed, outcomes will be used to improve on the

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processes in the next round of the charter open to all higher education institutions in 2016.

Universities who are successful in receiving the charter are required to make public their application and action.

Conference therefore calls on the Higher Education Service Group Executive to work with the National Black members' Committee to:

- 1) Explore ways to work jointly regarding the national survey of institutions involved in the pilot
- 2) Publish a list of institutions that have been successful in the Charter in UNISON publications to promote good practice
- 3) Keep service group members fully updated on the Race Equality Charter Mark via UNISON's Black Action and Black members update publications,
- 4) Provide advice and support on how branches can work with their institutions around race equality and tackling discrimination
- 5) Report back on related activities throughout the year via other UNISON media and at the Higher Education Conference 2017

6. Prevent

Fell

7. Control of Risk and Hazardous Substances in Higher Education

Carried

Conference notes that Health and Safety has not been exempt from the government's austerity cuts agenda. The continued drive to "cut red tape" has brought changes to both the way work environments and hazardous substances are classified.

Conference welcomes the initiative to standardise substance labelling worldwide and agree that when it comes to health and safety there is no room for error.

Although we welcome any measure that keeps workers healthy and safe, we must ensure that the changes do not compromise the health, safety and wellbeing of our members at work.

Working in the Higher Education sector, employees could come across a number of potential hazards on a daily basis. Many members working in the sector including researchers, lab technicians, grounds staff and cleaners need to be aware of the many potential hazards they will encounter such as;

- a) chemicals and products containing chemicals
- b) fumes

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- c) dusts
- d) vapours
- e) mists
- f) gases
- g) biological agents – this includes germs, cell cultures and DNA
- h) nanoparticles
- i) substances which are hazardous solely by nature of being explosive, flammable, or radioactive

However, despite the activities it undertakes, Higher Education is now not seen as a high risk sector and is no-longer subject to proactive inspections from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Conference recognises the need for our employers and the government to understand that we place enormous value on health and safety and will not sit back and let them destroy our right to a healthy and safe workplace through the relaxation and removal of the measures and provisions provided by excising legislation.

Conference calls on the Higher Education Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Publicise UNISON's recently revised safety rep guide on Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) amongst branches with members in Higher Education, recommending its use by safety activists and branch officers to arm themselves in discussions with their employer.
- 2) Consider working with the wider union to;
 - A) produce safety rep guidance on other hazardous substances [not covered by COSHH and therefore not in the guide] including substances which are hazardous solely by nature of being explosive, flammable, or radioactive; and perhaps even separate guidance on nanoparticles.
 - B) Lobby the government to review the decision to exclude Higher Education Institutions from proactive inspection.
- 3) Encourage branches to undertake a programme of work place inspections including review of risk assessment, training activities and any other documentation relevant to safety in the workplace as identified in the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977.
- 4) Work with branches to develop case studies demonstrating the benefits of transparency in health and safety in the sector on the whole. Share these case studies with branches and seek their promotion to other higher education employers via the Higher Education Safety and Health Forum (HESH).

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5) Ensure that health and safety in Higher Education is a feature at the next health and safety seminar.

6) Develop health and safety materials which are sector specific and encourages recruitment around health and safety.

8. Information Is Power

Carried

This Conference believes that the growth of privatisation and outsourcing in Higher Education presents a major challenge not just to the provision of services, but also to our ability to organise the workforce effectively.

This Conference believes that the service group's response to this challenge must be to support branches seeking to resist privatisation and outsourcing, and to seek to follow and organise members and potential members if any services or facilities are outsourced or privatised.

This Conference further believes that it is important to have a service group-wide strategy for this work, which is based on the best information available in order to support effective negotiations, campaigning, and action.

This Conference therefore calls on the Higher Education Service Group Executive to:

- i) initiate an annual survey of Higher Education branches in order to gather relevant information about privatisation and outsourcing;
- ii) produce a summary report of information gathered and make it available as part of the service group's annual report;
- iii) liaise with UNISON's Private Contractors Unit about the potential for integrating the information with the private contractors database.

9. Student workers

Carried

Conference is concerned at an apparently growing trend for universities to employ students in roles which are traditionally occupied by low paid women workers – jobs in cleaning, catering and clerical work.

Conference is aware that many students are forced to work to support themselves and supplement their student loans. However, these jobs are often portrayed as providing valuable work experience, when in fact they have no link at all with the student's studies. Where work is linked to study, this can leave the students open to exploitation and favouritism.

Further, so called "casual" work, which has previously been undertaken by a non-student workforce – frequently our members – is not genuinely casual. This is evidenced by the training required – as fire wardens and in health and safety for example, and by auto-enrolment into pension schemes.

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Conference believes that there must be protection for our members working in those fields most vulnerable to replacement by students under the guise of casual work and/or work experience.

Conference therefore calls upon the Higher Education SGE to:

- 1) develop guidance for branches on negotiating policies with employers to ensure transparency in the process for the employment of students, including what is and is not genuinely casual work and/or work which is appropriate for students;
- 2) continue to work with branches to protect members' jobs in areas which are vulnerable to casualisation;
- 3) explore the potential for identifying and recruiting student employees who are eligible for UNISON membership, in order to better protect their employment rights and offer them the additional advantages of union membership;
- 4) seek to work with the National Union of Students on the above action points, where appropriate.

10. LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) staff working overseas **Carried as Amended: 10.1**

Conference recognises over the last 10 years there has been a massive growth in UK University's opening overseas facilities, UK Universities are also increasingly involved in offshore campus partnerships.

Conference believes that working overseas can be beneficial, both professionally and personally, for the members involved and can provide a new and challenging context for teaching, research and administration.

However, Conference believes the process must be underpinned by two basic principles:

- 1) Staff must be free to decline overseas travel to destinations which they consider would be unsafe for them and in doing so they should not be subject to any unfavourable treatment from their employer.
- 2) Mobility must be adequately supported by the employer

Conference calls on branches to engage and negotiate with their employers over any new overseas working arrangements to ensure that staff interests are taken into account and to review existing agreements and arrangements on this issue.

Conference recognises that the UK has moved forward over the last decade around LGBT rights, which are enshrined in the Equality Act.

Conference also recognises that people around the world face violence & inequality and sometimes torture, even execution just because of who they love, how they look or who they are. Sexual orientation and gender identity are integral aspects of who we are and should never lead to discrimination or abuse.

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Conference calls for the Higher Education Service Group to work with the LGBT National Committee to develop specific guidance for LGBT UNISON members working overseas in Higher Education.

11. Higher Education deserves Fair Pay

Carried as Amended: 11.1, 11.2, 11.3

Conference notes that Higher Education pay and conditions continue to erode following the year on year meagre pay offer from UCEA (Universities and Colleges Employers Association). We know that Universities budget for a figure higher than what is eventually offered by the UCEA negotiators. UK Universities have been described by the Tory Chancellor as the 'jewel in the crown' of the British economy. Workers have not been rewarded for their contribution to this success to anywhere near the same level as senior managers and Vice Chancellors.

UNISON members working on university campuses across the UK have seen a continuing drop in living standards and an endless struggle to survive austerity. In the budget, the Chancellor announced changes to tax credits that will affect millions of working families across the UK, many of whom are UNISON members, providing high quality services. These changes to tax credits will hit hardest working families, and changes to thresholds will leave some families worse off by over £2000.

UNISON has condemned the latest workforce statistics published by Universities UK that show that women make up 54% of the total higher education workforce, but despite this 63% of those paid below £17,678 are women. This equates to over 20,000 female support staff working at UK universities. The same report highlights that whilst men make up 46% of the total university workforce, men make up over 70% of those staff paid over £57,032.

There is no valid argument why nearly half of all Higher Education Institutions (HEI) need to offer zero hour contracts to UNISON members that leave them in a vulnerable position and unable to rely on regular income. Following the Tory government's first budget announcement in July 2015 many of our lowest paid members working in higher education in receipt of tax credits will see their family income slashed by up to £2000 as a direct result of the Chancellor's attack on working tax credits. This directly hits those who are in work placing them and their families perilously close to becoming the 'working poor'.

This confirms our struggle against austerity and its associated hardship. The higher education sector is failing to reward its staff despite the Chief Executive of Universities UK attributing the success of the sector to the "hard work of university staff". Pay settlements across the economy have been running at between 2% and 2.5% over most of the last year. We must rise up and make all our voices heard in a campaign to contest the fundamental unfairness in a sector that can afford to pay more to its staff. Private sector pay rates are predicted to return to rates double that of the public sector over the coming year, with private sector employers expecting settlements of 2% over 2015.

A record increase in student numbers and a further hike in university fees will see higher incomes for universities. The Chancellor announced in his July 2015 budget

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he wanted to open the whole sector to new entrants and implement major reforms to ensure Britain has the best universities in the world. However, this will see our members doing more work for less reward as pay, pensions and terms and conditions are eroded.

The further fragmentation of the sector, as the government introduces new ways to split apart “successful” institutions from those that are struggling to recruit and retain students, will, if unchecked, lead to rich and poor universities. Whilst there is more money in the sector as a whole, those institutions claiming not to be able to afford a decent pay settlement for their workers, should be funded through government grants in order to do so, as we reaffirm our commitment to a publicly funded higher education service for all.

Conference also notes the following:-

- 1) In 2015–16 HEFCE will allocate £3.97 billion in public funds from the UK Government to universities and colleges in England to "support them in delivering high quality education, research and related activities". This provides public funds to institutions, but income is also derived from tuition fees and research funding amongst other income generating activities. Money is available in the sector to fund a substantial increase in staff salaries.
- 2) The sector is planning to invest over £15.2 billion on various projects during the next four years, an average annual investment of £3,811 million. This is nearly 50% higher than the previous four-year average (2009-10 to 2012-13) and does nothing to address the real terms downward trend of pay in the sector.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:-

- a) Devise a pay claim calling for 5% or £1000 whichever is the greater, to apply to all HEI salary pay points on the national payscale.
- b) To work with relevant organisations such as the Living Wage Foundation to find ways to encourage universities to become accredited Living Wage employers to ensure that Higher Education members are paid a decent wage for the work they do.
- c) Discuss and agree ways in which to reduce the use of zero hour contracts in the sector and to improve conditions for UNISON members already on them. There is no valid argument why some (nearly half) Higher Education Institutions need to offer zero hour contracts to UNISON members, whilst the majority of HEIs can manage without them.
- d) Conference is alarmed by the increasing use of temporary staff across universities, which drives down rates of pay and terms and conditions to the lowest possible level. Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to work with regions and branches on a campaign against the use of agency staff on campus.

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- e) Encourage members to lobby their Vice Chancellors on pay and where pay is less than the Living Wage, to ask for written justification which will be published to members highlighting why they cannot get decent and fair pay.
- f) Hold discussions with sympathetic groups such as the NUS and publish any support for the Higher Education pay campaign 2016 / 17.
- g) Devise ways in which information can be used to name and shame universities.
- h) Begin a campaign to gear up the membership to be prepared to take appropriate action in support of the pay claim. This should involve arming branches with information about how we can win a pay dispute if members are given a lead and our tactics are based on a clear plan of escalating the action until an appropriate settlement is reached. The material should emphasise that essential decisions throughout any dispute should be under the democratic control of our members.
- i) Raise the profile of the pay campaign amongst MPs (Member of Parliament), MSPs (Member of the Scottish Parliament) and AMs (Assembly Member) and UNISON's SOGs (Self Organised Groups).
- j) In the event that the pay claim is not met by the employers, seek to coordinate lawful industrial action in conjunction with fellow Higher Education trade unions, with a clear plan for escalating lawful industrial action to strengthen the campaign, in accordance with UNISON rules relating to industrial action

12. University wholly owned subsidiary companies

Carried

Conference, higher education employers are increasingly using the creation of wholly owned subsidiary companies to transfer support staff to deliver services. This is being used as a way to externalise staff for the purpose of creating a two-tier workforce to undermine the terms and conditions of new workers and placing the pensions and other contractual obligations of existing staff under threat. In certain circumstances UNISON has been de-recognised following staff transferring to a university wholly owned subsidiary. Whilst the employers see arms-length companies as a way of reducing costs, they fail to factor in the costs of running a subsidiary company; the reputational cost of failing to meet the required standards imposed by external regulatory authorities and the increasing standards demanded by a student population paying ever increasing fees and costs. This inevitably results in falling league table places and falling student numbers.

There is no place in higher education for employers to use this type of company as a method of reducing the terms and conditions of staff or to undermine established pension provision. We must strongly resist this development in the sector.

It is important that higher education institutions are fully aware of the problems associated with using a wholly owned subsidiary to deliver services rather than retaining its support staff in house.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:-

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- A) Raise awareness about the implications of arms-length companies in the sector.
- B) Produce materials explaining the disadvantages of wholly owned subsidiaries containing the tools to challenge their development.
- C) Encourage members to inform their branch of pending job losses following the introduction of arms-length companies at their university and to campaign against such job losses.
- D) Develop case studies that demonstrates the negative effect of the introduction of wholly owned subsidiaries from within Higher Education and other sectors within UNISON.
- E) Include as a mainstream topic for possible fringe / caucus meeting at conference 2017.

13. Equality rights and collective agreements in higher education

Carried

Conference notes that it was our union's national collective bargaining that established many equality protections long before they were enshrined in law. For example, our predecessor unions secured recognition of same sex partners for the purposes of workplace benefits before workplace discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation was banned and many years before the first same sex marriages.

However, conference notes the increasing numbers of higher education workers who are outside national bargaining and, in some cases, outside any collective agreement, on individualised contracts.

Conference acknowledges the challenges of collective bargaining for higher education members in the outsourced sector, which has numerous small employers. Further, many private sector employers mistakenly believing they do not need to deliver on the Equality Act 2010, nor put in place strategies to promote equality.

Conference also acknowledges the challenges of building union density and organisational strength in these types of higher education workplaces, to support collective bargaining.

Conference believes that our union's proud track record on equality and self-organisation is a great resource in meeting this challenge. For example, participation in UNISON's LGBT group unites scattered and isolated members around a shared identity and purpose. Many higher education activists have begun their union activism within self-organisation or young members organisation.

Conference therefore calls on the higher education service group executive, in liaison with the national self-organised groups and national young members forum, to:

- 1) challenge attacks on higher education collective bargaining agreements and on collective bargaining in general;

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- 2) raise awareness of the value of collective bargaining in relation to equality rights;
- 3) publicise and promote best practice in entrenching collective bargaining in community, voluntary and private workplaces that fall within the higher education service group;
- 4) increase efforts to build higher education workplace density and organisation to support bargaining, including via supporting and promoting our self-organised groups and young members organisation.

14. Age Discrimination in Higher Education

Carried

With rising pension ages both in the State and Employers Pension Scheme, Higher Education will see an increase in the age of its workforce.

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate against employees because of their age. Age discrimination can impact on someone's confidence, job prospects, financial situation and quality of life.

Older people in Higher Education may experience discrimination for example with regard to:

- 1) Mental Health problems
- 2) Recruitment and selection
- 3) Pay
- 4) Training and development
- 5) Promotion

Conference calls on the Higher Education Service Group to:-

- a) Highlight the provisions in the Equality Act 2010 that provide protections against ageism in employment.
- b) Provide guidance for branches and regions on how to recognise potential age discrimination and how to effectively challenge this.
- c) Raise the issue with the Equality Challenge Unit.
- d) Produce guidance to branches on mental health issues which can affect an ageing workforce for example, Dementia, Alzheimer's and other related conditions and how such cases should be managed.

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15. Reinvigorating Recruitment through Positive Policies on Free Education**Carried**

Conference notes that:

- 1) The recent Labour leadership campaign, as a result of Jeremy Corbyn's inclusion in the ballot and overwhelming victory, provided fresh opportunities for the labour movement and progressive forces to debate the way forward.
- 2) Central to the Corbyn campaign was a commitment to free education and abolition of higher education tuition fees.
- 3) This, together with other progressive policies was a major factor in the surge of support for Corbyn.
- 4) This support came from both within and outside the Labour Party and the trade union movement, particularly amongst younger people, many of whom were inspired enough to get active and get involved.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- a) Reaffirm, wherever possible UNISON's commitment to campaign for free education, the abolition of fees and for education at all levels to be funded through general taxation.
- b) Produce specific Higher Education recruitment material, learning from the experience of the leadership campaign, that sets out clear and attractive policies, emphasising a positive message.

16. New ways of working and reasonable adjustments

Carried as Amended: 16.1

Conference notes that government cuts mean employers are looking for new ways of working to save money without cutting jobs. Often referred to as Lean or Agile Working, these methods were developed by Toyota and are predominantly used in manufacturing industries. If implemented correctly they can bring financial savings and improve working conditions. While we recognise the value of this approach we need to ensure the impact on disabled members is considered at every stage.

Conference is concerned that some public sector employers are adopting measures to cut costs, reduce waste and increase productivity while ignoring key principles like effective communication, increased career development and improving staff satisfaction. Employers are failing to recognise that delivering public services is not a production line and a 'one size fits all' approach will not work.

Hot desking may reduce accommodation costs, but a study by the University of Wolverhampton found competition for space makes employees feel undervalued, reduces morale and effects productivity. The impact on disabled people is higher, with increased risk of illness from infection; eye strain from monitors that don't suit individual needs; muscular problems and fatigue from unsuitable chairs; loss of control for learning disabled people who rely on structure; and stress and anxiety for people who need a safe and accessible place for medication or disability related

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equipment. This type of working can actively aggravate an individual's disability or condition.

Open plan offices accommodate more people, but as average person's auditory band width is only 1.6 people, they make hearing, talking and concentrating difficult. The additional adverse impact on people with hearing impairments is significant; stress increases and productivity is reduced by up to 66% and people with mental health issues report the constant noise has a detrimental impact on their health.

Home or remote working is increasingly a popular option for employers and organisations because it reduces overheads and accommodation costs. However, employers are still responsible for workers health and safety when working at home but many don't carry out risk assessments or provide appropriate equipment. Home working can be a good option, but reduced social interaction and lack of support and structure can be devastating for some disabled members. Negative impacts including isolation and depression; pressure from no defined end to the work day; alienation from workplace changes; lack of development opportunities; and being overlooked for promotion can affect anyone working from home, but as some employers use home working to avoid making reasonable adjustments in the workplace the potential negative impact on disabled members is significantly higher. There are also significant detrimental financial impacts that employers are passing onto the individual, i.e. permission from mortgagor/landlord to cater for business use, additional broadband usage and additional household insurance costs that are generally unregulated.

Other aspects of lean working such as a production line approach, generic job descriptions, zero hours contracts, mobile working, commissioned outcomes and compressed hours can all have a differential negative impact on disabled members.

In Higher Education there is also a double standard by employers in the environments they provide for students versus what is provided for their own employees particularly in relation to space, equipment and investment in the infrastructure.

Conference calls on the Higher Education Service Group to work with the National Disabled Members Committee to;

- 1) Develop guidance for Branches and Regions to support disabled members to request reasonable adjustments to new ways of working.
- 2) Liaise and work with Service Groups and bargaining support, to share best practice examples of implementing new ways of working.
- 3) Use this issue to recruit and organise members and for branches to encourage members to form self organised groups in accordance with UNISON rules and the code of good branch practice.

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17. Closer Working with Students' Unions

Carried as Amended:17.1

Conference notes the vital importance of expanding the spirit and ethos of trade unionism amongst students. To this end, as a highly politically sensitive area of the union, we need to foster closer relations with students unions through the UK.

Students, as a group of 'consumers', need to realise that with increased tuition fees, they hold the whip hand and can place more pressure on universities to provide better services to them. Universities do not provide better services by paying their staff less than the Living Wage and cutting their numbers by using many years of severance and redundancies to squeeze more work out of us.

Many branches find that the potential threat of individual institutions withdrawing block grants from students' unions (SUs) or restricting funding could repress SUs commenting on their own institution or engaging with unions in vital issues. This denies a voice to students from providing perfectly reasonable input, debate and oversight and stifles a vast tract of universities' own 'customers' commenting on the standards of service that they have actually paid for. This is a dreadful method of suppressing honest debate and one which should not continue. It could be seen as a form of market manipulation by some paranoid institutions which cannot stand any type of criticism, no matter how positive or well-meaning.

Conference calls on the National Higher Education Service Group Executive to request talks with National NUS to encourage practical ways of nurturing political debate that seeks to liberate SUs from the potential of manipulation by host institutions and the threat of block grant withdrawal.

18. Higher Education as a Service Group

Carried

Conference notes that:

- 1) The Higher Education (HE) Service Group is one of the seven service groups of UNISON. (The website quotes "Higher education – including teaching and support staff")
- 2) Members of HE within UNISON have a proud record of sharing experiences and learning the lessons of victories and defeats, despite some historic differences between pre and post-92 universities.
- 3) Organisationally and on much public-facing material, HE as a Service Group is difficult to find, as the website confusingly refers to "Education Services". This effectively groups together parts of different service groups and is totally at odds with the agreed structure of UNISON.
- 4) Members and potential members looking for HE material on our national website will have a hard time to find it, making it more difficult for branches and activists to use the website effectively, as news and events relevant to Higher Education is lost within more general education-related material.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:

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- a) Make representation to the appropriate bodies in order that the identity of our Service Group – HIGHER EDUCATION, is clear on all of UNISON's public material, so that potential and existing members can clearly recognise their part of UNISON and see the positive effect which our union has.
- b) Request that if it is deemed necessary, to retain "Education" as a main "Where you work" heading, that this is split into sub-groups: Schools, Further Education and Higher Education.
- c) Ask those responsible for the website and other public material to re-align the information accordingly.

EM1 Changes to NHS Student Bursaries and Fees

Carried

Conference is concerned by the planned changes to the way that professional nursing, midwifery and allied health qualifications are funded in England, as a result of the 2015 Spending Review, we are aware that the Government's decision was heavily swayed following lobbying by the Council of Deans of Health and Universities UK due to concerns on the security of income they received under the old scheme.

This means from 2017, students undertaking studies in NHS Health Professions will need take out maintenance and tuition loans like other students rather than getting an NHS grant.

The removal of fee support and bursaries available to students undertaking these studies will result in them having to amass large debts which are likely to be a millstone around their necks.

Conference is aware that existing students not undertaking studies in NHS Health Professions are forced to work to support themselves and supplement their student loans. However this is unlikely to be an option for health students due to the requirements of mandatory clinical placements. These changes mean there is a high risk that this will in fact now deter many from entering these professions, as well as direct impact on widening participation.

Conference believes that the decision to make changes to the funding of future NHS students has not taken account of the full impact on both those students entering these professions, or the impact on staff with a high probability of a reduction in demand for Under Graduate places which will have a resulting impact on Post Graduate and Continuing professional development studies delivered by the higher education sector. The inevitable result of these changes is course closures and staff redundancies.

Conference therefore calls upon the Higher Education Service Group Executive to:

- a) Raise awareness of these changes and the impact it will have on staff working in the delivery and support of these courses.
- b) Lobby the government to reverse this decision.

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c) Work with Labour Link to seek assurances that a future Labour government would reverse the changes made to the current provision.