

2017 Energy Service Group Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

Brighton Centre

19 Jun 2017

Organising and Recruitment

1. Activist Learning and Development within Energy

Many lay activists have benefited over the years from specific utility linked training courses supported by UNISON's learning and Organising team. The most well known is the Negotiating Skills course for workers in a Utility setting. We have also had the opportunity in the past two years to do a specific pay bargaining course for senior lay activists in the Energy sector.

These national courses have been well received and make up for a significant deficit in Utility specific training in the regions largely down to numbers and scale. Many courses only have a particular public sector focus which is very different from the world in which Energy members work and therefore their needs are different and should be recognised as is the case today.

Conference is therefore concerned at changes which may significantly impact on the viability of the Utility specific training supported by LAOS. These changes concern the level of fee increase charged to branches which has increased from £80 per course per participant to a new fee of £125 per day per delegate.

This conference therefore calls on the Energy SGE:

To make further representation to LAOS to argue for additional Utility specific national activists training and that the fees are reconsidered.

To ensure that it is recognised that energy members contribute significantly to the financial income of the union and having access to some specific training should not be seen as an excess.

To continue to support capacity building amongst lay activists within the energy sector to help them be equipped with the rights skills to negotiate directly with leading industrial employers.

Ask that the Energy Service Group updates branches on progress on this important matter.

North West Gas

2. Supporting our Supporters

As the Energy Industry has changed from the "glory" days of privatisation to the very complicated structures we now have to organise within so too has the range of problems affecting our members and representatives.

The Energy Sector has faced major changes including the splitting off of the distribution businesses, company mergers, business diversification, the sell-off of established core businesses such as retail and contracting, outsourcing and off-

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shoring. Workers have been shifted from company to company and role to role with changing working conditions, new locations, different contract terms and increasing employment insecurity.

The rise of call centre operations has brought an obvious pressure for fast and efficient responses to customer enquiries with increasingly regimented ways of working, productivity targets and disciplinary procedures. The introduction of smart metering is bringing huge changes in the way meter fitting and reading is managed with many jobs being lost (as in meter reading) or having a limited duration (as in smart meter fixing).

These changes have completely transformed our working landscape and have greatly impacted upon the way we organise for representation and the actual role of our trade union representatives. Too often our representatives struggle to provide advice on complex issues, ongoing support to individual and group concerns, and the excellent representation of our members that we aim to feature in our front line response. We can sometimes place huge expectations on ourselves to deal with complicated and sensitive work issues on behalf of our members in our own companies and those who work alongside us, with limited resources and time.

What help is available to support the supporter?

We call upon the Energy Service Group Executive to identify what support is being provided both regionally and nationally to over-worked Trade Union Representatives, to identify where there are unmet needs, to establish examples of good working practices between branches and to share these with all branches within the Business and Environment Sector.

In addition we believe a workshop should be arranged at the 2017 Energy Seminar to look at the specific issues we may have in obtaining support for our representatives with a view to delivering some strategic planning to target the issue across the energy sector both nationally and regionally. It would be helpful if there could be regional staff present at the Energy Seminar.

Thirdly we believe UNISON should increase awareness and access to training opportunities amongst its representatives particularly with regard to equality, counselling and specialist training courses that could enable representatives to build their resilience and that of their branch colleagues to deliver confident and sustainable support.

Finally we call upon the Energy Service Group Executive to provide a point of contact to act as liaison and set expectations between representative and member when all other local and regional avenues have been exhausted, particularly in those cases where representative and member work for different employers and at different locations.

Western Energy

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Negotiating, Bargaining and Equalities

3. Race Inequality in the Workplace

Conference notes that despite efforts to bring further equality into society, evidence shows that Black workers are still being held back in the job market. The amount of Black members holding senior posts in the energy employers still remains low, unemployment amongst Black people remains high - particularly amongst young Black people - and Black workers are also more likely to be in less secure forms of employment than White workers.

In a recent report published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission titled, 'Healing a divided Britain: the need for a comprehensive race equality strategy', it is stated that a failure to tackle deep-rooted race inequality will exacerbate division in our society unless urgent action is taken. Hailed as the biggest ever review into race equality, the 73 page report looks at a number of aspects of everyday life including education, employment, housing, pay and living standards, health, criminal justice, and participation.

For our union, clearly it is important that we support our members both in and outside of the workplace, and how we respond to tackling widespread inequality must remain a priority.

In workplaces that inequality is still prevalent, Black workers with degrees earn 23.1% less on average than White workers, and a significantly lower percentage of Black members (8.8%) work as managers, directors and senior officers. Black workers are also in insecure forms of employment such as temporary contracts or working for an agency – this increased in the last 5 years by nearly 40% compared with a 16% rise for White workers.

Unemployment is also a huge challenge. The unemployment rate amongst Black people is at 12.9%, and for young Black people in particular there has been a significant increase of unemployment. Apprenticeship opportunities are significantly lower for Black people, and Black men and women experienced some of the largest falls in full-time employment since the recession began and as the austerity programme continues.

It is sometimes difficult in workplaces for Black members to feel able to challenge this ongoing inequality. Some members have advised that they will not challenge or seek recourse if they feel they have been passed over for promotion. In addition, as there is now no legal requirement to carry out an Equality Impact Needs Assessment when reorganising services, being able to challenge where and why changes are made and the impact these have on Black workers can often feel overwhelming.

Conference notes that Branches and Regions continue to challenge employers when reorganisations are proposed; however, it is clear that inequality exists in many walks of life, particularly in employment. As a union we have a proud tradition of supporting Black members, this is particularly seen in our Black members Self Organised Group.

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Conference calls on the Energy Service Group Executive to work with the National Black Members' Committee (NBMC) to:

1. Produce material for Branches and Regions to use to highlight the continued gap between Black workers who hold senior positions compared to White workers, with key points on how to tackle this in the workplace;
2. Encourage Regions to work with Branches to ensure that all employers complete Equality Impact Needs Assessments when carrying out reorganisations, and to ensure Black members take a lead role in scrutinising these assessments together with representatives from other SOGs; and
3. Encourage Branches to work with Employers to seek to ensure more apprenticeship opportunities are open to Black people

National Black Members' Committee

Campaigning

4. Hydrogen Gas

Conference notes that UNISON is the largest staff union in the UK gas industry and has a proud heritage of supporting Gas members going back to local municipal gas corporations.

Conference further notes that UNISON has members working right across the industrial spectrum from qualified engineers, scientists, finance, managerial, customer contact, emergency response, shipping terminals. The list goes on.

The future of the gas industry remains open to question and is a source of concern for members in the industry. This is despite the fact the over 90% of UK homes rely on Gas as a primary source for heat, hot water and for cooking food.

Environmental obligations and dwindling domestic supply have led some to call for the replacement of Gas with renewable electricity referred to as the electrification of heat. This would be a colossal undertaking considering that already generational capacity is close to its demand limit and Coal generation is being phased out. In coming years the electrification of cars is also likely to significantly increase electricity demand beyond system capacity.

The development of technology around Hydrogen Gas and recent work to consider its use across the UK gas distribution system has the potential to be a significant game changing development. Hydrogen is carbon free when used and so does not contribute to global warming with the right production system. It could use the existing gas distribution pipe network and the national conversion could be fully funded by continuing the levies already in place on household bills.

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This conference therefore calls on the ESGE to;

- i. Support UNISON members working in the Gas Industry, by helping progress a sustainable future for the industry.
- ii. Help promote through engagement with key stakeholders, the development of a Hydrogen alternative into the future, so that Gas can be used safely in UK homes while still employing thousands of workers and supporting the UK's environmental obligations.
- iii. Seek to use its influence to promote the work of its members in the Gas industry and the proud heritage we have in this union.

Energy Service Group Executive

5. Safe Driving

Many UNISON members working in Energy will be familiar with various safe driving initiatives introduced by energy employers. This development will include not just broad awareness of the hazards of driving but also tracking devices which can monitor speed, braking distances, erratic driving etc.

Although UNISON would support common sense approaches to ensure we all drive safely and work with employers to ensure this is the case, we are increasingly concerned at the one sided approach now often adopted by energy employers.

Recent examples of this include the prospects of instant dismissal for those who transgress while at the same time pressure on workers who drive intensifies with more appointments booked or more scheduling of work in the same working day or week. This is unacceptable and any notion of safe driving for workers needs to incorporate safe working limits.

This conference therefore calls on the Energy SGE;

1. To continue to monitor the situation with regards to safe driving and to survey energy branches to understand the scale of these initiatives.
2. To put together a briefing note to Energy branches on how UNISON reps should respond to these developments and negotiate any improvements or mitigations
3. Understand the level of disciplinary action related to this issue affecting UNISON members and branches
4. Raise the issue and seek support from the UNISON health and safety unit and bargaining support unit.

Energy Service Group Executive

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6. Call Centre Charter – how far have we come?

Conference notes the increasing numbers of our energy members working in call centres. Call centres can leave workers chained to their workstations under extreme pressure to provide faster responses to more and more callers.

Conference welcomes UNISON's Call Centre Charter, launched in 2012, to seek to establish a decency agenda for these members, allowing them to work effectively and efficiently in safe work environments. This followed research for UNISON into call centre work which found high levels of workplace stress, bullying and harassment, leading to higher than average levels of sickness absence.

Conference notes that while any worker can be subject to bullying and harassment, it disproportionately affects certain groups of workers including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) workers. UNISON's first annual equality survey, conducted over the summer of 2016, found that LGBT members faced particularly high levels of discrimination even amongst these survey respondents, most of whom were from disadvantaged groups. Two thirds of trans workers and a third of LGB members had experienced or witnessed workplace discrimination in the past year. This compares to a quarter of all members responding.

Our energy members working in call centres report a range of issues including anti-LGBT abuse from callers. This is made worse by not being taken seriously by managers. Our LGBT members have little confidence in their managers' willingness or ability to address such abuse.

Conference believes it is time to review and refresh our work on the Call Centre Charter. Conference calls on the energy service group executive, working with the business and environment equal opportunities working group, to:

- 1) Survey energy branches on whether their employer has signed up to the charter;
- 2) If so, investigate:
 - a) how it is being implemented and
 - b) Whether it makes specific reference to tackling anti-LGBT abuse;
3. Urge training for managers and staff on LGBT equality issues and combating harassment and bullying;
4. Work with branches where the employer has not adopted the charter to negotiate its implementation.

National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Committee

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Developing an Efficient and Effective Union

7. Energy Conference and Energy Branch Seminar

Conference notes the importance of the two main events in the Energy Service Group year – namely our Annual Conference and our Annual Branch Seminar. Both of these events are occasions of interaction and learning for our activists and also an occasion to recharge the batteries of our enthusiasm.

However, it has been noticeable over recent years that our Energy Conference is not as well attended as it could be and that there has been a decline in the amount of material on the agenda.

It has also been noticeable that the opposite is the case with the Branch Seminar which is always well attended and of great interest because of the many and varied topics up for discussion.

In the current economic climate and with the recent decrease in membership numbers it is not surprising that some branches may be finding it difficult to send adequate delegations to both events and that this results in some promising activists missing out on a great learning and networking opportunity.

Conference therefore instructs the National Service Group Executive to investigate the possibility of merging the Energy Conference and the Energy Branch Seminar in to one event over several days (in much the same way as the Police and Justice Service Group have successfully done for several years). This should be done keeping in mind the separate policy making nature of the Conference element.

Conference instructs the Energy Service Group Executive to report back to the 2018 conference with a view to putting the proposal into action by late 2019.

Scottish Electricity Branch

Motions Ruled Out of Order

Action not specific to the Conference

Motion Facility Time

Conference, in 2020 facility time is going to be capped in the public sector in accordance with the Trade Union Act. All public sector employers will have to publish information on the cost of time off for union reps, plus a breakdown of what facility time is used for. This includes collective bargaining, representing members and training programmes.

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This will have a detrimental effect on the relationship between employers, unions and employees. It is also going to restrict our ability to represent members especially those who are disabled.

Whilst this conference recognises that at present the Trade Union Act and its impacts on facility time are not yet an issue for energy employers, we also recognise that we cannot be complacent. We also recognise that disparity exists within different employers with some strong facility time arrangements and some less so.

Good facility time arrangements are an absolute essential to ensuring strong representation of members and in addressing all issues of inequality and specifically the issues of disabled members.

We therefore call upon the Energy Service Group Executive to;

1. Monitor any developments on facility time by surveying branches on facility time arrangements with energy employers. Note good examples and also keep track of any reductions.
2. Ensure that robust arguments and strategies are in place to protect facility time arrangements within energy employers and ensure that union representatives are able to fully perform in the role.

National Disabled Members Committee

Motion Changes to the way taxable benefits work through salary sacrifice schemes

This Energy Conference notes that the Government and the HRMC are making significant changes to the way taxable benefits work through salary sacrifice schemes.

Conference further notes that many energy employers have used such schemes to enable staff to take advantage of a range of products such as car purchase schemes and energy discounts. However whilst this has had some benefit to staff, energy employers themselves have gained by reducing national insurance obligations.

Conference understands that many key employee benefits would have traditionally still been provided in simple ways such as direct energy credits into energy accounts or staff discount cards with retailers etc.

Conference is now concerned that any changes now being made by the Government should not disadvantage energy members or leave them exposed to additional charges as a result of contracts being cancelled etc. Instead we should see energy employers return to more simplified ways of giving additional benefits to staff which are more transparent and user friendly.

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Conference therefore calls on the Energy SGE to

1. Survey branches to fully understand what is happening, energy employer by energy employer and how they are responding to the HMRC changes
2. Give advice to branches who are being challenged by employers and ensure this becomes a key bargaining objective to prevent any loss to members through schemes being cancelled etc
3. Share good practice around the energy service group so when energy employers develop new staff benefits we can improve the overall workplace of all energy members.

North West Gas

Beyond remit of the Conference

Motion Recruiting and organising Black members in the fragmented workforce

It is important that Black workers and members are equipped for the challenges within the changing and evolving landscape of the UK today, especially in the Energy sector. Conference recognises that Black workers left behind especially after out sourcing and TUPE situations, are now more likely to be working in more isolated workplaces, under increased pressure and with less resources making them even more susceptible to unfair and unequal treatment. A proportion of these Black workers work in the “fragmented workforce” where they experience low pay and poor working conditions are eligible to join UNISON.

Conference believes that recruitment is more than just handing out leaflets. Branches need assistance to reach out to Black workers and members in the fragmented workforce. These workers need a revised strategy to engage them as the traditional approach is weak at best and not effective at worst.

Our existing members in this niche sectors need to be organised and encouraged to become activists. They will then need continual support, bespoke training and mentoring.

UNISON should explore effective and clear pathways which will assist Black members in not only developing as activists, but becoming leaders for the future.

It is therefore important that financial reasons do not become a barrier to Black members in the fragmented workforce becoming active. If an employer does not recognise trade unions (UNISON), it does not have a legal duty to give members paid time off to attend training to become workplace reps or health and safety reps etc.

Conference calls on the Energy Service Group Executive to work with the National Black Members Committee to work with the NEC to:

1. Develop information and resources targeted at Black members and workers in the fragmented workforce.

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2. Consider ways to support members who wish to become workplace representatives but are unable to access paid time from their employer.
3. Develop further specific training targeted towards potential Black leaders
4. Recognise the positive progress made in getting Energy employers to become accredited living wage employers, effecting outsourced members in a positive way.
5. To continue to ensure all Energy employers are accredited.

National Black Members' Committee

Not sufficiently clear

Motion Workplace domestic abuse policies

Conference notes that following on from a women's conference decision in 1998, a model domestic abuse workplace policy and accompanying guidance were produced.

It is the intention that all UNISON workplaces have such a policy in existence, and many have been negotiated in the public sector. However, they are still not commonplace in the private sector, with few in Energy companies.

This is despite statistics from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which revealed that:

- UK businesses lose 1.9 Billion each year because of domestic violence;
- 1 in 5 women victims will take time off work because of domestic abuse;
- 2 in every hundred victims will lose their jobs;
- And of those who remain in work, 75% will be harassed, abused, threatened or assaulted at their workplace.

Conference notes that domestic abuse knows no boundaries. 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men are affected; domestic abuse accounts for 16% of all violent crime in England and Wales, with 2 women a week and 30 men each men murdered.

The impact on our members cannot be underestimated. Both on the victims and their colleagues who may struggle to support them; be covering for their absence and/or feel at risk themselves if the abuser is making contact at the workplace.

Further, given the nature of the membership in the energy sector, many of our members may be working in isolation without access to easy support – either emotional or practical. It is therefore crucial that UNISON offers support to any members experiencing domestic abuse.

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Conference calls upon the SGE to encourage branches to:

- seek recognition from the employer that they have a responsibility for the health and wellbeing of their employees, and therefore to implement workplace domestic abuse policies, based on the UNISON model policy;
- implement management training on recognising the signs of domestic abuse, incorporated into existing return to work processes where appropriate;
- raise awareness of the UNISON There for You assistance available to members experiencing domestic abuse;
- consider providing training for workplace reps on supporting members experiencing domestic abuse.

National Women's Committee