**Brighton Centre**

**18 Jun 2018**

**Organising and Recruitment**

**1. Recruiting and representing disabled members in the Energy sector**

Conference notes that recruiting new members is a priority for UNISON. Increasing our density in the Energy sector will increase our bargaining power with management and help us get the best deal for our members at the negotiating table.

Challenges in the Energy sector, such as rolling TUPE programmes, increased use of call centres and outsourcing and offshoring, often hit disabled workers hardest. We need to let these members know that there is a union who understands the issues they face as disabled workers and is willing to stand up for them.

In some cases disabled members’ first experience of UNISON is through their regional self organised group (SOG) which can act as a safe space to discuss workplace experiences of discrimination. It is important that workers in the Energy sector are aware of our SOGs and that, in turn, SOGs can support them to become active in the branch.

Conference notes the UNISON recruitment leaflets “Fighting for Fairness and Equality” (which covers all SOGs and retired and young members) and “Disabled and Worried about the Future?”, both of which are available for branches to order on the UNISON website.

Energy branches can further support disabled members by electing a branch disability officer and by supporting the establishment of a branch disabled members self organised group.

It is also important that our Energy stewards are fully aware of the legal framework and bargaining tools available so that they can better represent disabled members. Conference notes that the following resources are available to download and print from the UNISON website:

1. Reasonable adjustments for disabled workers

2. Disability leave question and answer factsheet

3. Access to Work factsheet

4. Tackling hate crime and hate incidents: a workplace issue

Conference therefore calls on the Energy Service Group Executive to:

a. Encourage Energy branches and regions to include specific recruitment materials aimed at disabled members on recruitment stalls and at local and regional events

b. Promote our Disabled Members SOG, its regional groups and national events and actively work with branches to engage disabled members in their workplaces and to encourage the election of branch disability officers and the establishment of branch disabled members SOGs

c. Raise awareness of the bargaining resources available to support representing and negotiating for disabled members working in the Energy sector.

***National Disabled Members Committee***

**1.1**

Add new sentence at end of 2nd paragraph:

"Young disabled workers in particular need to know that such support is available, and it is important to recognise that they may need additional support as they enter the world of work."

Add new bullet point

d. Seek to work with young disabled members in the Energy service group to develop a strategy on young disabled members’ recruitment and organisation.

***National Young Members' Forum***

**Negotiating and Bargaining**

**2. Bargaining for good Mental Health policies in Energy workplaces**

Conference notes that our workplaces are changing, with members in Energy facing increased workloads as targets are increased year on year and working conditions often deteriorating when new management takes over.

These pressures have made the importance of ensuring good mental health in Energy workplaces clear.

At least one in four of us will experience mental health problems at some time in our lives and at any one time one in six workers is experiencing a mental health problem. Although mental health problems aren’t always caused by work, unrealistic targets, poor management, bullying and discrimination can exacerbate them.

The cost to UK employers in mental health related sickness absence, lost productivity and staff turnover is estimated at £26 billion. However the cost to our members is incalculable.

Conference notes UNISON’s recent branch guidance “Bargaining on Mental Health Policies” which includes a range of steps Energy branches can take to raise the issue of mental health with their employer.

The guide outlines the legal protections for members, such as the right to reasonable adjustments for disabled people, including those experiencing mental health problems. It recommends working with employers to comprehensively review the organisation’s policies to promote mental wellbeing and support staff with mental health problems.

The example of EDF Energy is used as a case study to demonstrate how taking mental health seriously can have benefits for both members and the employer, with increased productivity and a rise in job satisfaction. The “Time to Change” programme at National Grid is also highlighted, with Energy workplaces clearly leading the way on this work.

However, there is still more to do to and Conference therefore calls on the Service Group Executive to:

1. Publicise UNISON’s “Bargaining on Mental Health Policies” guidance to Energy branches, including encouraging branches to lobby employers to make a public commitment to mental health wellbeing in the workplace

2. Seek and disseminate examples of best practice in Energy branches

3. Use this work as a recruitment tool to engage new members, including disabled members, in UNISON.

***National Disabled Members’ Committee***

**3. Inclusive workplace policies**

Conference celebrates UNISON’s work over the past 25 years to promote women’s equality and participation and to tackle sexism and sex discrimination at work, in our union and across society. Like other service groups, the energy service group has a majority of women members and our rules and practices to encourage women’s participation are vital to achieving our equality objectives. Likewise, in our negotiations, it is vital that we demand employers consider the impact of policies and practices on women workers and take active steps on equal pay and to tackle all forms of workplace discrimination.

Considerations of gender and monitoring of women’s progress or experiences are key to much of this. Conference notes however that an overemphasis on gender where gender has no relevance can have the unintended effect of reinforcing gender stereotypes, which in turn reinforce gender job segregation and the glass ceiling.

Conference also notes that some initiatives for women’s equality are framed as though all workers are either women or men. There is increasing recognition that some workers do not identify as having a binary gender – as being solely male or female. Instead they identity as non-binary – as neither male nor female, as both or something entirely different.

Conference believes that workers should be able to attend work according to their gender identity, whether this is female, male or non-binary. This may mean small but important changes to systems and facilities so that they are inclusive, such as:

1. Inclusive gender and title options in electronic records;

2. Checking gendered language (such as he/she, sir/madam, sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers) in policies and communications;

3. Flexibility in any gendered dress codes;

4. The option of gender neutral changing or toilet facilities.

Conference notes that gender neutral toilet and changing facilities are not a new idea. They have been commonplace in workplaces and public venues across Europe for many years. We all use gender neutral toilets every day without thinking about it, for example on trains and in our homes. Organisations that have introduced gender neutral private cubicles with open washing spaces have found that they increase users’ sense of safety and reduce graffiti. Sometimes this option can be introduced easily by designating some facilities as gender neutral. In other building, it will need a redesign, to ensure facilities that are safe and accessible and provide greater privacy, such as individual lockable cubicles rather than open plan communal changing rooms.

Conference calls on the Energy Service Group Executive, working with the business and environment equal opportunities working group, to:

a) gather good practice examples from energy employers of inclusive policies and practices, including in record-keeping, language, any dress codes and in the provision of safe and accessible gender neutral facilities;

b) promote the good practice across the service group.

***National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Committee***

**4. Flexible working**

Conference notes that the right to request flexible working was extended to all employees in 2014.

However, the experience of reps and members within the energy sector is that many employers are only prepared to agree to flexible working patterns for certain groups of staff, and then only on limited terms.

Further, new shift working patterns are being introduced which involve late night and weekend working, impacting adversely on members’ home lives and caring responsibilities.

Conference notes that employers are required to give serious consideration to any request for flexible working; can only reject such a request for specific business reasons; and that the employee has the right to appeal against refusal to grant the request.

Conference calls upon the Service Group Executive to share good practice in this area and to issue updated guidance to branches on:

1. The right to request process;

2. The factors to be considered in making such a request;

3. How to appeal against refusal of a request.

***National Women's Committee***

**4.1**

5th paragraph – insert after “good practice”, “and model flexible working policies”; delete “in this area”.

Add new paragraph after paragraph 4 - “Where an employer does not have a flexible working policy, branches should be encouraged to negotiate one using the model flexible working policy. Where an employer does have a flexible working policy in place, however not sufficiently robust, branches should be encouraged to negotiate stronger flexible working provisions.”

***Yorkshire & Humberside Region***

**5. Npower and SSE Merger**

UNISON Energy Conference notes with cautious concern the proposed merger of SSE and Npower which will see the Big 6 energy suppliers become the Big 5 and the merged company holding 12.7 million customers combined.

Conference we note also the SSE chief executive Alistair Phillips-Davies claiming that the merger will create a new model – one that would combine the “resources of established players with the agility and innovation of an independent supplier”. Meanwhile the CEO of Npower talks about “scale and skills” needed for the success of a merged company. He will be focusing on merging the right skills to achieve the scale the merged company wants to achieve.

When we hear terms such as “scale and skills” agility and innovation, synergies and consolidations and economies of scale it is hard not to worry that these are buzz words for cost efficiencies through job losses and redundancies.

Our members in Npower are concerned about what this all means for their future employment, whether they are of the right skills and have the agility or innovation to be those who make it through to a merged company should the merger go ahead. The company in the meantime says it is all too early to talk about the impact on the workforce, meanwhile they are able to accommodate the concerns of MP’s and the CMA worried about competition and the market and shareholders worried about the share prices and dividends.

We call on UNISON Energy Service Group Executive to ensure that UNISON;

1. Engage with the senior management of both companies to seek guarantees there will be no compulsory job losses and any attrition will be done voluntarily and on decent terms;

2. Seek agreement that both companies will commit to retraining and retaining employees who wish to stay on in the new merged company and contribute the success of ‘Mergeco’

3. Works to ensure that no merged employee is materially less off in their terms and conditions of employment;

4. Seek guarantees about the respective pension schemes to ensure that no transferred employee is materially worse off under a new pension arrangement; and

5. Make sure that the new Mergeco’ will honour existing recognition agreements with the trade unions.

***Yorkshire & Humberside Region***

**Campaigning**

**6. Flexible Working**

The landscape for all workers is becoming increasingly difficult in these times of austerity imposed by a Tory Government. As an energy sector, it is all too common to see our call centres becoming outsourced and frustrations around shift patterns are a common theme.

Our members are being told that they have to work to cover customer demand, being expected to stretch themselves over a working day which could start from 7am and in some cases till 10pm at night. This creates difficult decisions for families who have children, caring responsibilities or disabilities.

Our reps are constantly battling through ambiguous flexible working policies, which are misinterpreted by ambitious management trying to squeeze every possible hour out of the day.

A recent example in an energy workplace where staff had gone through a difficult and stressful shift review which affected over 300 staff in October 2016. This caused a massive influx in requests for flexible working because the shifts proposed were very early, starting at 7am, or lates until 8pm, in a 3 week rotation including a weekend of Saturday and Sunday.

A review panel was set up but in all of the appeals I was involved in I argued that none of the panel were adequately qualified to make the decision in a fair way with particular issues around childcare or disabilities.

According to the Money Advice Service in Britain the average cost of sending a child under 2 to nursery (outside London) is:

£116.25 per week- part time (25 hours)

£222.36 per week - full time.

So effectively, if you work part time, based on a British Gas salary, 25 hours per week, take home pay would be on average £850 a month, the cost of childcare per month is about £835. It doesn't take great genius to work out that effectively you are working for no money. British Gas does offer childcare vouchers at £30 a week, but this is the same as was in place over 20 years ago and has never been reviewed.

Predominantly childcare is left to working mothers.

Conference calls upon the Service Group Executive to

1. Campaign to make our workplaces more family friendly.

2. To ensure flexible working policies are correctly enforced.

3. Carry out a review of current flexible working policies.

***North West Gas***

**7. Support Leeds H21 Project – Hydrocarbon**

UNISON welcomes the partnership between UNISON employers Northern Gas Networks and Leeds City Council together committed to pursuing the conversion of Leeds to a 100% hydrocarbon city. Converting the UK gas grid to hydrogen will be a major step towards meeting the UK’s carbon reduction targets. Currently, over 30% of all UK carbon emissions come from domestic heating and cooking. A UK-wide conversion to hydrogen gas will reduce heat emissions by a minimum of 73% as well as supporting decarbonisation of transport and localised electrical generation. This will be a major contribution to achieving the goals of the COP21 Paris Agreements and the UK 2050 targets.

The UK gas industry is over 200 years old and UNISON has a long history of association with it. For the first 150 years gas provision was delivered through town gas containing 50% hydrogen and carbon monoxide and methane. In the 1960/70’s following the discovery of North Sea Oil, the UK took to converting to natural gas made up of predominantly methane. This programme to Natural Gas required the national wide conversion of domestic appliances to accommodate the predominantly methane base North Sea gas supply. This gas supply still feeds over 80% of UK population for their heating and cooking. Conversion to cleaner greener and more sustainable hydrocarbon takes this conversion one step further but using the same infrastructure, pipelines and appliances. It is within our recent experience to conduct such a large scale conversion and is therefore realistically achievable, cost effective and environmentally necessary.

Such a development would not only secure UNISON energy members jobs but provide a great opportunity to build increased employment and membership in the sector. It is also the best demonstration of what a just transition for energy members really looks like.

Northern Gas Networks which recognises UNISON is working in partnership with Leeds City Council to develop Project H21 in Leeds and the objective is to make Leeds one of the UK’s largest cities to run on 100% Hydrogen.

The project has already shown that:

a. The gas network has the correct capacity for such a conversion

b. It can be converted incrementally with minimal disruption to customers and at the same cost as natural gas.

c. Minimal new energy infrastructure will be required compared to alternatives.

d. The existing heat demand for Leeds can be met via steam methane reforming and salt cavern storage using technology in use around the world today.

We therefore call on the Energy Service Group Executive to

1. Continue to promote Hydrogen conversion of the Gas Network as the best and most cost effective way forward to achieving a clean future for the heating of homes and businesses in the UK.

2. Promote the H21 project as Leeds based example of what can be achieved.

3. Recognise the huge energy jobs potential of such a conversion programme and organise to recruit in this area.

4. Support the development of an all party parliamentary group to promote this conversion and lobby MPs and the Government to take this challenge seriously.

***Yorkshire & Humberside Region***

**8. Stress in call centres and operational centres**

Conference notes that many energy members work in call centres and operational centres where they take calls from operational colleagues and customers. While most callers are reasonable, there is always a proportion that are unreasonable and some who are extremely abusive. In workplaces with generally high levels of stress, this can be intolerable. Members who are particularly vulnerable to harassment and discrimination, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender workers, can be particularly affected by this.

Other front line staff energy are also at risk of harassment from the public or contractors. LGBT staff can be negatively judged not just for the way they speak but also for the way they look, the way they walk and so on, and treated without respect.

Research from 2017 by the TUC – ‘The cost of being out at work’ - showed the continuing high levels of discrimination facing LGBT+ workers, with 39% having been harassed or discriminated against by a colleague, 29% by a manager and 14% by a service user or member of the public. Digging deeper into the findings, of the whole LGBT+ sample, trans workers are much more likely to experience discrimination than non-trans workers. Young workers and those in insecure employment are the least likely to have the confidence to be open about being LGBT at work.

Research from 2017 by UNISON confirmed that LGBT members are unlikely to report discrimination because they fear that their manager will not take either them or the issue seriously.

UNISON has long recognised the need to tackle stress, including in call centres and for other front line staff. In 2012, UNISON launched the Call Centre Charter, 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.

In 2017, this conference resolved to review and refresh work on the Call Centre Charter. The conference called for a survey to check how many employers have adopted it and for equality, specifically including anti-LGBT harassment and abuse, to be a key part of implementation.

In the past twelve months, levels of stress among energy members have certainly not improved.

Conference therefore renews its call on the Energy Service Group Executive, working with the business and environment equal opportunities working group, to:

1. Survey energy branches with call centre members on whether their employer has signed up to the charter;

2. If so, investigate:

1. how it is being implemented and
2. Whether it makes specific reference to tackling anti-LGBT abuse;

3. Work with branches where the employer has not adopted the charter to negotiate its implementation;

4. Urge training for managers and staff on LGBT equality issues and combating harassment and bullying across all energy employers and for all staff.

***National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Committee***

**9. Renationalisation**

Conference notes that UNISON is the largest staff trade union in the energy sector and has many thousands of members working in customer and retail operations in the big six energy suppliers.

Conference further notes that this union is proud of its members in this area and recognises the services they provide to customers day in and day out.

Due to the inadequate way the energy market operates in the UK, including excessive profits in the past and uncompetitive deals, millions of customers are switching accounts often away from the big six to smaller suppliers many of whom have no trade union recognition and treat staff poorly. This flight from the big six is putting member’s jobs at a very real risk and in the long term without some intervention could decimate our overall energy sector membership.

We must recognise that the political landscape has significantly changed in the past two years with a revitalised Labour Party promoting again the notion of public ownership and renationalisation as a means to addressing failing markets and the inadequacy of the privatised utility companies. This is to be welcomed. However, at the last General Election the Labour Party manifesto committed only to renationalising energy networks, distribution and transmission while at the same time creating new regional public sector energy retailers to compete against the big six, other private companies and municipal energy companies.

This would have led to even more job losses and high levels of anxiety for members in areas in which UNISON is strongly represented. This is not acceptable.

Conference therefore calls on the Energy Service Group Executive to;

i) Engage with the Labour Party through UNISON Labour Link, to promote the need to renationalise the customer and retail operations of the energy suppliers to protect member’s employment.

ii) To develop a strong rationale for this proposition to ensure a compelling case is made.

iii) To ensure that the jobs, pay and conditions and pensions of members in energy are protected during any future renationalisation.

iv) To work with the NEC and UNISON Labour Link to promote renationalisation along the lines this motion supports, and the very clear benefits to all concerned by such a move including all energy members.

***Energy Service Group Executive***

**Efficient and Effective Union**

**10. Municipal Energy Companies**

Conference notes the recent growth of municipal energy companies serving consumers across the UK, including recent announcements by the Scottish Government and the Mayor of London to create new energy companies.

Robin Hood Energy, founded by Nottingham City Council, has a mission to tackle local fuel poverty and is the most successful so far in attracting customers. However many of these municipal energy companies are being promoted as a cheaper alternative to the big six retail energy companies which employ thousands of UNISON members and recognise trade unions. Many are also just “white label” operations with other companies with a full energy license.

Conference further notes that these municipal energy companies are also currently losing many millions of pounds in trading losses which ultimately is public money and could be used elsewhere. The conference has long recognised that energy workers and local authorities have a massive role to play in energy efficiency measures to reduce both fuel poverty and winter deaths.

Conference further notes that as these municipal energy companies grow it is likely that this will have a negative impact on the job prospects of members.

Conference therefore calls on the Energy Service Group Executive to;

i) Investigate the growth of municipal energy companies and the financial robustness of them

ii) Understand better the challenges they might pose to UNISON’s energy membership

iii) Work with the Local Government Service Group to see what organising and recruitment potential exists within municipal energy companies and how we might grow membership and union power within them.

***Energy Service Group Executive***

**11. Report back on combining Energy Conference and Energy Branch Seminar**

This conference notes that at last year’s energy service group conference 2017, a motion submitted by the Scottish Electricity Branch was agreed by delegates, calling for a report into the setting up of a combined energy seminar and conference. It also called for this to be reported back to the 2018 energy service group conference.

This report has been circulated to branches and is contained within the energy service group annual report.

This conference is therefore asked to note the report and accept the recommendations contained within.

***Energy Service Group Executive***