

2018 Water, Environment & Transport Conference

UNISON FINAL AGENDA

Brighton Centre

17 Jun 2018

Organising and Recruitment

Recruitment and Organising

1. Recruiting and representing disabled members in the WET sector

Conference notes that recruiting new members is a priority for UNISON. Increasing our density in Water, Environment and Transport (WET) will increase our bargaining power with management and help us get the best deal for our members at the negotiating table.

Challenges in the WET service group, such as job cuts and TUPE transfers in the Environment Agency, the impact of decades of transport deregulation, and increased competition and TUPE transfers in the water industry, 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 WET service group 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.

WET 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 WET 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 WET Service Group Executive to:

- a) Encourage WET branches and regions to include specific recruitment materials aimed at disabled members on recruitment stalls and at local and regional events

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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 WET service group

National Disabled Members Committee

Negotiating and Bargaining

Bargaining

2. Angling Trust – Voluntary Bailiff Scheme

This Conference calls upon the Service Group Executive to work with the Environment Agency Sector Committee to investigate the cost / benefit of the Environment Agency funding a Voluntary Bailiff Scheme.

The Environment Agency has used Rod Licence Income to fund staff at the Angling Trust to set up a volunteer system and has provided equipment and training.

This is in a time of reducing Grant In Aid funding for fisheries where posts are being lost in area teams.

Several years on members are yet to see any benefits from this scheme and question whether the money could have been better spent on staff within the Environment Agency.

We call upon the Service Group Executive to work with the Environment Agency Sector Committee to investigate the cost / benefit of this scheme with a view to returning the funding and work back to Environment Agency staff.

Environment Agency Nw Unison

2.1

In 2nd line of the last para after “a view to... insert “asking the Environment Agency to”; then delete the word 'returning' and replace with 'return'

Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Executive

3. Lyme Disease

This Water, Environment and Transport Conference is aware of cases of Lyme disease to employees in the Water Industry and likely elsewhere to members within the Service Group.

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The disease is caused by bacteria transmitted to humans via the bite of an infected tick or other blood feeding insect.

Most affected are likely to be field workers, especially those in Wastewater and serious illnesses can be a result by these bites and in the worst cases up to and including death.

We call on the WET SGE to work with UNISON's National Health and Safety unit to put into place an awareness programme for the benefit of existing and future members.

United Utilities

3.1

3rd para first line after 'Wastewater' delete the word 'and' then insert 'or working for the Environment Agency.' New sentence 'Serious.....'

Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Executive

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 water, environment and transport 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

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5. Absence Management In The Public Sector

Over the past few years, many local authorities and health trusts have engaged Absence Management Providers to manage absences. In the case of Scottish Water, an off-shore company called First Care have been engaged as the first point of contact when staff are going to be absent for medical reasons.

Their selling point to clients in the public sector is that they believe that there is a significant under-reporting of absences and that they can reduce the number of absences using their services. This seems to us to be contradictory - if the "under-reporting" is resolved, surely the levels of absenteeism will go up. They also sell the fact of equal treatment to employees, which if managers were adhering to company policies and procedures, they would be without the need for such companies and their services.

Despite Scottish Water having a below average level of absenteeism and no evidence to suggest that there is indeed any significant under-reporting, public money is being spent employing these providers for no discernible benefit.

We call on the WET Service Group Executive to highlight the use of these companies in the public sector and the fact that;

- a) Managers in the public sector already have the tools to manage absences,
- b) Rather than manage the line managers who are not performing as they should, we are using public money to manage absenteeism and
- c) In these days of austerity in the public sector, this money would be better spent on providing better or increased services which benefit our customers.

Scottish Water Branch

6. Bargaining for good Mental Health policies in WET workplaces

Conference notes that our workplaces are changing, with members in Water, Environment and Transport (WET) facing increased workloads as targets are increased year on year and working conditions often deteriorate under TUPE transfers.

These pressures have made the importance of ensuring good mental health in WET 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.

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Conference notes UNISON's recent branch guidance "Bargaining on Mental Health Policies" which includes a range of steps WET 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 The Highways Agency is used as a case study to demonstrate how taking mental health seriously can have benefits for both members and the employer, with an 18% decrease in mental health related sickness after the establishment of a joint management/union working group, training for managers, a stress toolkit and reasonable adjustments in place.

Conference also congratulates the Environment Agency North West branch on the work they have undertaken to train up health and safety reps specialising in mental health.

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

1. Publicise UNISON's "Bargaining on Mental Health Policies" guidance to WET 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 WET branches
3. Use this work as a recruitment tool to engage new members, including disabled members, in UNISON.

National Disabled Members' Committee

6.1

Add bullet point:

4. Note the work undertaken by young members on this issue and seek to work with the National Young Members' Forum on developing relevant resources for young workers in this service group.

National Young Members' Forum

7. The role of markets in delivering Water Services

Conference notes that OFWAT in their publication Water 2020 have declared an intention to look to promote markets to deliver services in Water Resources and Bio-resources. Following the collapse of Carillion and the ramifications on public services is it not clear that a 'markets' based strategy could have similar devastating

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consequences for both the public health of the country and the livelihoods of our members who work in the industry.

This Conference calls upon the Service Group Executive to;

1. Clarify its position on the use of markets in the water industry.
2. Ask OFWAT what protections they have in place to protect customers and our members' jobs to avoid another 'Carillion fiasco'.
3. Consider holding a workshop at the next WET seminar to explore in more detail what the impacts could be on service to customers and our members terms and conditions.

Yorkshire Water

8. WET e-learning - is it up to the Job?

Quality training and development is important to our members. Yorkshire Water recently closed its training centre in favour of pushing more e-learning onto desktop PCs in the workplace.

The list of benefits to WET companies is endless. Massive cost savings are achieved by closing training centres, no course materials, no travel time, less work disruption and cover arrangements etc.

As e-learning is only set to expand within our sector, it is important that the health, safety and wellbeing of our members is considered.

In this motion, conference is asking the Service Group Executive to produce a basic guide or check list that would assist branches in their discussion with employers. The guide or check list may include some of the following:

- a. That WET companies have conducted an analysis to determine the right training delivery method (Classroom V E-learning) before making changes.
- b. That employers have considered the specialized learning needs of their workforce and have responded.
- c. For those employees covered under the Equality Act reasonable adjustments have been put in place.
- d. That due diligence in assessing the Quality and effectiveness of Training has been carried out.
- e. That E-learning providers are the best in their speciality and that legal requirements are met.
- f. Challenging that technology is implemented in a structured and reasoned manner and never for technology's sake.

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- g. That reporting tools, output by the e-learning programme, are not used unfairly against members.
- h. To push employers to re-invest savings back into more training and development of their workforce. It is estimated that companies can save anything from 30% - 70% of their training budgets.
- i. That appropriate learning environments are available. Noisy and busy offices with interruptions are not the right place.
- j. That policies are in place to ensure reviews of e-learning are jointly undertaken by the company and union.

Yorkshire Water

9. Health and Safety Reps standby

This conference notes the ever-increasing need for safety improvements in the WET sector.

Yorkshire Water Branch would like the sector to adopt the approach being taking at Kelda where we have formed a health and safety representative's standby rota.

It has been designed for union health and safety reps to get called out to investigate significant near misses, accidents and incidents anytime during a 24-hour period.

This conference calls upon the service group executive to:

1. Consult with Yorkshire Water branch to determine best practice.
2. Launch an action plan to assist branches to adopt similar arrangements where appropriate.

Yorkshire Water

10. The push for upper quartile – The ignored impact on employees

As conference will be aware OFWAT is pushing forward it's vision for the water sector commencing in 2020. A major part of this is to push competition between the water companies harder than before. The phrase 'upper quartile' is now bandied about as the place to be and those who are not 'upper quartile' will be penalised and punished.

Come day one of the next five-year period any water company not assessed in the 'upper quartile' will lose out. This model means that there will always be losers as not

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all companies can finish in the 'upper quartile' in fact only three or four will do so. As a result, there will always be more losers than winners.

The impact on employees is massive as teams are already being changed and increased performance targets set. As companies push to achieve the elusive 'upper quartile' position without even knowing what is needed to attain the position. Targets may be achieved and/or exceeded with the result still being failure. Hard working employees may end up being penalised through no fault of their own, which will not only increase stress in the work place but may lead to increased job insecurity.

In response to OFWAT publishing its strategy for the next five years, from 2020, this Conference calls upon the Service Group Executive to:

- (1) Respond to OFWAT's strategy outlining the negative impact on employees
- (2) Engage with OFWAT to encourage the consideration of employees when setting future strategies to avoid unwanted side effects.

Yorkshire Water

11. The Push towards Homeworking – 'Good or Bad'?

Conference is aware that homeworking has increased substantially in recent years and is only going to continue in the future, as sector WET companies continue to cut overheads, save space, encourage flexible working and require an agile workforce.

Yorkshire Water are currently encouraging their workforce (office based) to consider working from home at least 1 day at week on a permanent basis. Although this might suit both parties we need to remain vigilant that homeworking arrangements are to be entered into voluntarily and members should not be forced into switching to home working arrangement.

It is accepted there are benefits of homeworking but these tend to weigh in favour of employers rather than employees. Benefits for Employers include: reduced overheads, increased productivity, better morale and motivation and they can also show they are helping the environment. For employees benefits may include: reduced commuting time, a better work/life balance and easing the caring responsibility.

The Health and safety of our members, without question, is paramount in considering homeworking. Employers need to fulfil their Duty of Care (Safety at Work Act 1974 - which extends to Homeworkers) they have and ensure things like, there is suitable workspace at home, a risk assessment has been completed, DSE checks are carried out, and lone worker arrangements are in place.

The Well-being of members must be considered by companies and support measures put in place so members do not feel isolated from the organisation or frustrated about not being informed about changes.

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It is acknowledged there is a considerable amount of helpful information on homeworking available which includes UNISON's guide (2017) which includes a 'Model Homeworking guide'.

In response to employers pushing or encouraging employees to Homework. This Conference calls upon the Service Group Executive to:

- (1) Send out the latest UNISON homeworking guide to all WET branches, so that branches can compare, if policies exist, or negotiate with employers where necessary the introduction of homeworking policies.
- (2) Consult with branches to find out the current extent of homeworking within the WET sector - especially those who are normally office based, whether it is, ad-hoc or 1 or more days on a permanent basis.
- (3) Enquire of WET Branches, where possible, how many of them have agreements on homeworking.
- (4) Evaluate any evidence to suggest WET employers are pushing or encouraging their workforce to work from home.
- (5) Consider holding a workshop session at the next WET seminar to share information, best practice and consider inviting an appropriate experienced speaker to explain the good, bad and ugly about homeworking to ensure WET members health, safety and wellbeing are protected while working from home.

Yorkshire Water

12. Equality e-Learning within WET companies

All employees regardless of age, ethnicity, sexual orientation and any disability are to be treated equally and have equal access to opportunities. They must have a sense of belonging at work. They must feel respected and valued for who they are and have a level of supportive energy and commitment from others so that they can do their best at work.

Yorkshire Water Branch is pleased with its employer's roll-out of its mandatory equality and diversity e-learning training for all employees which reinforces these requirements.

Conference calls upon the Service Group to: -

1. Promote the application of equality e-learning within their workplace.
2. Form a good practice guide to be passed out to branches so they can start discussions with employers if training is not in place.

Yorkshire Water

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13. Zero hours and Black workers

Recent news has reported that the number of people that are unemployed has hit a record low. What these statistics do not report is that a large proportion of this is due to the increase in zero hours contracts.

Employers have increasingly been turning to zero hours contracts as part of the general attack on staff terms and conditions. Under these contracts, an individual typically undertakes to be available for work but the employer does not undertake to provide any work and only pays for the hours worked.

We are aware that some individuals choose these contracts in order to meet with family commitments; as flexible contracts that takes personal responsibilities such as taking care of children or elderly relatives into consideration are not available. However for many other vulnerable workers, of which many of them are Black workers, this is not a choice. We know that within the Water and Transport sector, zero hours contracts are being used with ancillary workers post.

A large number of zero hours contracts affect the low paid and majority of these are Black workers who are disproportionately affected. For these workers, zero hours contracts have a negative impact in a number of ways:

There is no guaranteed level of regular earnings;

1. the need to be available for work when required by the employer hinders the ability of staff to take up other employment;
2. the variability of earnings throws into doubt an individual's eligibility to claim various state benefits;

Zero hours contracts have also shown themselves to be more open to abuse than regular permanent contracts.

Uncertainty about hours offered each week can lead to fear among staff about complaining or raising issues concerning any aspect of the job or service.

This motion calls on the Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Executive Committee to:

- a. Undertake a survey of branches nationally to enquire how many Black workers on zero hours contracts have taken on a second job.
- b. Consider ways to promote the values of trade union membership and Black members self-organisation and produce a basic guide for workers on know your rights

National Black Members' Committee

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14. Use of consultants and day-rate contractors in the Water Industry

Conference notes that water and wastewater companies are increasingly using very expensive consultants and contractors – some on day-rates as high as £1,000 or more. This is especially prevalent in the run up to each five-yearly Price Review, the current one being towards PR19. The reasons given by the companies include:

- a. the low number of people with the industry-specific or domain-specific expert knowledge needed to do particular “high powered” roles
- b. permanent employees have failed in the past to deliver outputs that have adequately satisfied OFWAT and other industry regulators
- c. the need for workforce flexibility – consultants and day-rate contractors can be hired and let go easily.

Conference also notes that consultants and day-rate contractors are highly unlikely to belong to a trade union, or to become fully engaged in the issues that UNISON branches and staff councils are concerned about. Often they do not even consider unions and other employee representatives as key stakeholders in the business plans and changes that they are hired to work on.

Conference further notes that wages for employees in the Water Sector who are covered by collective bargaining consistently fall behind the real rate of inflation, gradually eroding salary value. One factor in this is the need to pay excessive wages to others, within a fixed overall company budget. To pay for the contractors and consultants, the money that might otherwise be used to fairly reward collectively bargained Water Sector staff is taken away. Furthermore, this also:

- i. Removes funds to train permanently employed staff to undertake this “consultancy”-level work.
- ii. Lowers investment in human capital – any insight and experience gained by temporary staff leaves the business when they do
- iii. The outputs generated – be they weighty reports or recommendations to the company executive team – are often never properly acted on or found to be almost worthless sometime after the consultants’ departure; the money spent is wasted.

Conference therefore believes that the way forward is for UNISON to engage with the executive leadership and HR departments of the water companies, and with industry regulators and politicians to turn this situation around.

Conference calls on the WET Service Group Executive to:

1. Through the Water Industry Sector Committee: identify the work being undertaken by contractors and consultants at each water company, and where possible find the purported reason for using these expensive temporary human resources – and to find if any internally staffed alternatives may have been considered.

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2. Publish briefings to all Water Sector branches on the topics of (a) Bargaining for Improved Employee Training in the water industry, (b) Negotiating for the reduction in the use of consultants and day-rate contractors in the water industry in favour of permanent staff, (c) Model Organisational Change Policy and Strategy to ensure employee consultation and engagement.

3. Raise the need for permanent water industry employees to be adequately and regularly trained to ensure that they have the industry-specific knowledge and skills that water companies need with the water sector via the regular consultative meetings between WET officers and both OFWAT and CCWater – and at the open Board Meetings held by OFWAT. Emphasise that a five-year plan is needed so that many fewer consultants and day-rate contractors will be needed in the run up to PR24 in five years' time.

4. Highlight these important issues in UNISON's Network Magazine, the dedicated UNISON magazine for WET members, and on the WET pages of the UNISON website.

Southern Counties Water

15. 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 WET 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 identify 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;

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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 WET Service Group Executive, working with the business and environment equal opportunities working group, to:

- a) Gather good practice examples from WET 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

16. Essential Water Company employees are underpaid

Conference notes that water and wastewater companies have a regular (usually annual) opportunity, when pay talks are undertaken, to lift the wages of their lowest paid - but essential - employees.

Conference in particular notes that many employee groups in the Water Industry are adversely affected because their level of pay is compared to that for generically similar jobs in their region or nationally. By not taking into account factors such as:

- a. the amount of industry-specific knowledge and experience needed to effectively fulfil their roles
- b. their level of industry-specific responsibility for compliance in areas such as: prevention of environmental pollution or maintaining drinking water quality.

Water companies can hold down wages below what they should be.

These groups include:

- i) Technical Call Centre staff
- ii) Wastewater Treatment works operators, technicians and scientists
- iii) Water Supply works operators, technicians and scientists

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Conference also notes that: employees in these groups are increasingly expected to work shifts that extend into unsocial hours, without any additional reward for disruption to their family life and balance between work and recreational and rest time.

Conference believes that UNISON branches organising in the Water Industry should take a focussed approach to these issues, by:

A. Working to get the job descriptions, and the mechanisms used to calculate the value of these jobs, changed to take into account the factors that should increase their calculated value.

B. Ensuring that the pay, terms and conditions of undervalued groups are enhanced through negotiation and bargaining to reflect these relevant industry-specific factors.

Conference calls on the WET Service Group Executive to:

1. Through the Water Industry Sector Committee: confirm the identity of undervalued employee groups within the water industry, monitor their levels of pay, and collect related job descriptions and evaluation mechanisms. From this information, enable the production of a set of recommendations for action.

2. Publish a briefing to all Water Sector branches on the topics of job descriptions and job evaluation in the water industry.

3. Raise the issue of valuing and rewarding industry-specific knowledge, skills and responsibility with the water sector via the regular consultative meetings between WET officers and both OFWAT and CCWater – and at the open Board Meetings held by OFWAT.

4. Highlight this important issue in UNISON's Network Magazine, the dedicated UNISON magazine for WET members, and on the WET pages of the UNISON website.

Southern Counties Water

17. Potential impact on jobs in water, environment and transport of the Government's 25 year environment plan

Conference notes the publication in early 2018 of the Government's 25 year Environment Plan. Environmental stakeholders welcomed its publication, and the long-term vision which it suggested, but were concerned that there were very few concrete policy and legislative measures contained within it. Conference shares these concerns, in particular over the lack of measures that would be implemented over the next 3-5 years, and concrete plans for a programme of spending to improve the environment.

Conference recognises that job levels across the service group depend upon environmental policies and programmes of investment, including in public transport. The environment agencies in England, Wales and Scotland implement and enforce

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environmental regulations, while water company investment is driven by environmental requirements as well as commercial considerations. Without effective environmental requirements the jobs of members engaged in environmental maintenance and improvement will be lost as companies slash investment to boost profits. Furthermore, many of our members have chosen their career path because of their commitment to protecting and improving the environment, and strongly support stringent, effective regulation that enables environmental improvement over time. Their jobs are satisfying and meaningful because of their social value.

In the light of this, conference expresses its strong concern about the lack of concrete proposals for legislative action in the 25 year plan. It calls upon the Service Group Executive:

1. To use whatever mechanisms are available, in alliance with like-minded organisations, to press the Government for an ambitious Environment Act to put into legislation the necessary measures and regulations which will lead to environmental improvement over the next 25 years, including measures with impact in the near term.
2. To use all mechanisms available to press for further work to be done by Government in areas with a potential to improve the environment and members' security of employment, including placing the appropriate value on potable water and options for low-carbon public transport, and for funding for public transport improvement.
3. To work with UNISON Labour Link to make the case to the Labour Party for the legislation and work programmes outlined in 1 and 2 above.

Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Executive

18. Automation, artificial intelligence and robotics in the Water Industry

Conference notes that water and wastewater companies will be including increased use of automation, artificial intelligence and robotics in their business plans for AMP7 (PR19) that they will be submitting to OFWAT. Surveys of senior executives in various industries show that organisations believe the combination of humans and machine intelligence will create a more effective, engaged and meritocratic workforce. The term "workforce" will eventually encapsulate both human employees and intelligent machines - the future is expected to be made of machines working alongside humans, not merely replacing them. However, this change will have to be managed carefully.

Conference in particular notes that areas in the Water Industry likely to be affected include:

- a. Contact Centres – increased use of IVR (Interactive Voice Response) for handling customer calls, and chatbots for text-based interaction
- b. Transport – self-driving tracks and tankers

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- c. Surveying – use of drones
- d. Work in hazardous environments – use of robots
- e. Human Resources – automated analysis of video and phone interviews prior to shortlisting

Conference also notes that: the economic case for introducing such technology depends partly on it being cheaper to run than waged/salaried humans. However robotic agents cannot yet master soft skills, innovate or draw on experience outside of work; introduction of automation involves considerable analysis and design work; and machines need to be programmed, trained and maintained.

Conference believes that UNISON branches organising in the Water Industry should take a two-pronged approach to these issues: both encouraging the Water Industry to upskill their employees for this new world of work, rather than making current employees redundant and hiring other people into newly created jobs; and ensuring that the pay, terms and conditions are enhanced to reflect the reduction in routine tasks and increase the skills needed for a more automated industry.

Conference calls on the WET Service Group Executive to:

1. Issue a briefing to all WET branches on the topic of automation, artificial intelligence and robotics in the Water Industry.
2. Raise the issues around the increased use of automation, artificial intelligence and robotics with the Water Industry via the regular consultative meetings between WET officers and both OFWAT and CCWater – and at the open Board meetings held by CCWater.
3. Through the Water Industry Sector Committee, monitor the introduction of automation, artificial intelligence and robotics within the Water Industry and consultation taking place to mitigate any negative effects on members.
4. Highlight this crucial issue in UNISON publications including Network magazine, the dedicated UNISON magazine for WET members.
5. Include automation, artificial intelligence and robotics as a topic at the WET Seminar in October 2018.

Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Executive

Campaigning

Campaigns

19. Sustainable Water at Work

This Conference calls upon the Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Executive to further develop the excellent “Water at Work” campaign that they

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launched in 2009, which sought to extend access to drinking water at work from mains supply sources.

In order to keep workers healthy at work, we expect that all our employers covered by the Water, Environment and Transport Service Group take steps to ensure that their employees are suitably hydrated during the working day.

However, in 2018, it remains the case that many employers in many workplaces still supply access to drinking water from less sustainable options than from mains water. This presents a significant environmental challenge, largely associated with the fact that this drinking water is supplied in single-use plastic vessels of varying sizes.

In order to reduce the carbon footprint and minimise the environmental impact of employers in our Service Group when providing access to drinking water, we call upon the Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Executive to build upon their excellent work to date in this area and to develop a campaign to deliver 'Sustainable Water at Work', where possible working with like-minded organisations in order to achieve this aim.

Environment Agency NW Unison

20. Review of safety practices in the Water Industry

This 2018 WET Conference is aware of the disturbing number of accidents/incidents/near misses that continue to occur year on year in the Water Industry.

One undeniable root cause is reducing staffing levels to the bare minimum as part of a risk management strategy which must continue to be opposed by UNISON.

This Conference calls on the WET SGE to work with UNISON's National Health & Safety Unit to undertake a safety review within the Water Industry which should include an analysis of accident statistics identifying root causes and to find any common themes to then organise an appropriate campaign highlighting the findings.

United Utilities

21. The UK is facing a future of Water Deficits – Is Re-Nationalisation the only sensible answer?

Conference notes that research for the Adaptation Sub-Committee's (ASC) 2017 Climate Change Risk Assessment evidence report considered a range of possible scenarios to assess water availability in the UK up to the 2080's. The research, by consultancy HR Wallingford, considered differing levels of climate change, population growth and efforts to adapt to the impacts of climate change. In the

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absence of further actions to those already planned by water companies to balance supply and demand, under a high population and high climate change scenario, UK water supply deficits are projected to become more widespread by the 2050's.

In particular:

a. The North West of England and the Yorkshire and Humber region are projected to be highly susceptible to supply/demand deficits, as are London and the South-East. However, deficits are also projected in other parts of the UK, including areas of South Wales and the central belt of Scotland.

b. On a national scale, England, Scotland and Wales are projected to be in deficit by 800 million to 3 billion litres per day by 2050 (5–16% of total demand) and by 1.4 billion to 5 billion litres per day by 2080 (8-29% of the total demand).

Reducing the risk

There are 32 water companies in England and Wales regulated by OFWAT. Companies are responsible for monitoring and controlling the water they supply to their customers. By law, all companies must produce a Water Resource Management Plan to forecast supply and demand in their area and explain how they plan to deliver secure public water supplies for at least the next 25 years.

When there is a drought, water companies implement Drought Plans which include a series of actions to ensure water resources are effectively managed. This includes, for example, temporary restrictions on water use (e.g. hosepipes, Garden sprinkler systems, and swimming pools), allowing more water to be taken from rivers, and transferring water from other regions.

To prepare for changes in water availability in the future, water companies are also looking at ways to reduce the risk of shortages and ensure supplies are resilient.

Is it enough?

With the continued flow of money to private companies and owners in the form of profit rather than investment can we expect significant improvements in the balance between water supply and demand, with the substantial associated benefits. In the longer term, improvements on this scale are unlikely to be enough to manage the risk of major deficits by the 2050's under a high climate change scenario.

Conference believes that only re-nationalization will secure supplies for future generations and calls upon the Service Group Executive to;

a. Review companies new water 2018 resource management plans when they are published. In particular, we are keen to see whether stretching targets suggested by Water UK – and other measures to conserve supply and reduce demand – will be adopted.

b. Lobby elected members, work with UNISON Labour-link and other supportive groups to bring the Water Industry back into public ownership.

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c. Launch a campaign to ensure water companies with a water surplus do not benefit financially from those customers who reside in a current water deficit region.

If not, the risk of UK water shortages looks set to rise.

Yorkshire Water

22. Stress in call centres and operational centres

Conference notes that many water, environment agency and transport (WET) service group 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 WET staff 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 WET members have certainly not improved.

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

1. Survey WET branches with call centre members 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. 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 WET employers and for all staff.

National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Committee

23. Protecting members' jobs through assuring good environmental standards following E U exit (Brexit)

Conference recognises that after the UK's departure from the EU, the European Commission will no longer fulfil the vital function of overseeing and assuring the UK Government's legislative and policy efforts to maintain and improve our environment. It notes that DEFRA Secretary of State, Michael Gove has proposed a new UK-based body to fulfil this role. Conference believes such a body is essential, but it must have all the necessary powers, freely exercised, if it is to fully replace its EU predecessor.

Members working within all parts of the WET Service Group are directly affected by these structures. In water, environment and transport the extent to which effective policy is developed, and then implemented and enforced, drives employer strategies and where resources are directed - including how many staff are employed to ensure compliance with environmental requirements and to reduce environmental impacts. Weak structures of assurance will directly impact on members' jobs as employers reduce their investment in measures to protect the environment, and will lead to pressure on terms and conditions as policy imperatives no longer result in the investment of public money in environmental improvement.

Conference believes that trade union environmental reps would be perfectly placed to contribute to both policy development and assurance on correct implementation. To do this effectively they need to have appropriate legal protections and facility time, in the way Union Learning Reps and Health and Safety Reps do. Conference also believes that the Environment Agency could itself play a key assurance role, if sufficiently distant from Government and with its remit to develop and make policy officially restored. The loss of this ability, removed by the Tory Government, has

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been keenly felt in recent years, and has hampered the effectiveness of the Agency in its efforts to develop and implement robust and workable regulatory regimes.

Conference calls upon the Service Group Executive to:

1. Campaign for an environmental oversight body as described earlier, and work with other like-minded organisations to achieve this.
2. Campaign for Trade Union Environmental Representatives to have the legal status that would enable them to work effectively.
3. Press the Environment Agency to distance itself sufficiently from Government and develop policy capability, enabling it to independently act in the public interest on environmental issues, rather than as an agency of Government.
4. Through UNISON Labour Link, to make the case for all these changes to the Labour Party.

Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Executive

24. Defined Benefit Pensions in WET sectors

Conference notes with concern the terrible situation faced by pensioners in Carillion's pension schemes, following the collapse of the company with a huge pension deficit outstanding. Conference further notes that Carillion paid high levels of executive and director pay, and bonuses, and substantial dividends to shareholders, while not addressing the deficits in its pension schemes.

Many WET members in the Water sector, working for private sector bus operators and for the Canal and Rivers Trust, have watched these events with alarm as their pensions also depend on the strength of the employer covenant. Sufficient funding for pension repair costs and effective management of pension schemes are an urgent priority to ensure that members receive the pensions they expect upon retirement.

Conference therefore calls upon the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Encourage all member representatives to engage with their relevant pension schemes and to request copies of latest actuarial valuation information and scheme annual report and accounts.
- 2) To report any concerns to UNISON'S Pensions Unit for members who can advise accordingly.
- 3) Increase awareness amongst UNISON activists and scheme representatives that the Pensions Regulator expects employers of DB pension schemes to prioritise deficit repayments over dividend payments.
- 4) Campaign for Trustees of DB schemes to adopt a full, independent, cost transparency review in order to maximise cost efficiencies and boost returns.

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- 5) Campaign for greater Member Nominated Trustee representation on Trustee Boards.
- 6) Look to hold employers to account that are maximising profits and dividend distributions at the expense of making decent contributions to their pension scheme.

Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Executive

Efficient and Effective Union

Resources

25. Organising Young Members in the WET Service Group

This WET Conference recognises that young members are the lifeblood of our union and the future within the WET Service Group.

We call on the WET SGE in conjunction with the National Young Members Forum and UNISON's communications department to develop bespoke publicity and materials to retain existing members and recruit current non-members in all areas UNISON organises within the WET Service Group.

United Utilities