



# Energy

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## Addressing the biggest challenges



It's all well and good shouting from the sidelines, but at UNISON, we're not just defending members' jobs: we're seeking genuine solutions to some of the biggest challenges we face as a society.

We recognise that, by some distance, natural gas dominates domestic energy supply and when this gas is burnt, it is adding to our greenhouse gas emissions. If we are to contribute seriously to any debate we need to ask – what is the alternative? And is it cohesive, affordable and achievable?

One answer is to convert the methane gas we use into hydrogen – because burnt hydrogen gas emits almost no greenhouse gas. The conversion of the UK's gas network (which employs many UNISON members) to using hydrogen is feasible and, in time, it could use hydrogen gas produced from renewable energy.

UNISON is leading the way in looking at this solution and the overall exciting potential of hydrogen gas. The recent launch of the hydrogen all-party parliamentary group (chaired by Anna Turley the Labour MP for Redcar) was a UNISON initiative and gives genuine cause for optimism.

Campaigning for hydrogen power is just one example of how UNISON is representing energy workers in the widest possible sense: not only in

fighting for workers' rights now – but for ensuring there are jobs in the future.

Our long-standing representation of energy workers is something I've always been passionate about, having once been the national negotiator for the electricity sector when it was in public hands. Energy is a core public service and as the biggest staff union in the sector, you should be reassured that we're using our strength to influence the political and policy debates that define the future of the industry.

**Dave Prentis**  
General secretary, UNISON





## A view from your national officer

With the energy price cap affecting jobs, and uncertainty over the future of energy, times are tough for workers in the sector, but UNISON is here to support you

It's fair to say that things are not getting any easier for workers in the energy sector. Faced with an absence of any planning by government, workers are being left at the total mercy of markets, which only specialise in short-term thinking and what is today's cheapest price. Trying to operate an energy system across the UK in the same way that you might sell car or home insurance simply does not work and it is certainly not in the best long-term interest of the consumer.

What we are being faced with right now is nothing less than a crisis, but one in which the pain is currently only being experienced by the energy worker. Give it a few years, however, and consumers will also be suffering – by which time solutions will be harder and more expensive to implement.

Take the energy price cap, which was introduced to help the hard-pressed consumer. It was never the cap which was at issue but the level it was set at, and the political promises by the prime minister ensured political considerations would always take priority. The price cap had already been rejected as a remedy by the CMA (Competition and Markets Authority) but it has been introduced anyway, and at a level which will lead to further job reductions and a further transfer of employment away from collectivised and unionised employers to a myriad of small non-unionised employers with less certain employment. As many of these new entrants trade at a loss (deliberately to gain market share) they don't have a sustainable future nor do the workers, but by the time they hit the buffers the damage will already be done.

We are seeing thousands of unionised jobs going among the Big Six and as a result we are having to be innovative in our responses to employers seeking to protect our members

from the worst of it. Take our largest employer in the sector, British Gas, which is shedding 4,000 jobs. We are seeking to secure a no compulsory redundancy deal and a major say in any site closure programme, while at the same time pressing for a decent pay offer. With other employers we are having to engage in difficult conversations about lowering pay and conditions for new starters to ensure workers are still recruited directly and within collectivised employment terms and not simply by outsourced contractors putting further pressure on existing workers. At times all this can feel like a Hobson's choice but if we don't think creatively we will end up in a much worse position going forward.

Another area of indecision which is blighting energy workers is the need to decide on what the energy future looks like. Decisions need to be taken on this now, if we are to navigate around what is known as the 'energy trilemma': energy that is clean, affordable and secure. What we need is a clear view of what the government intends to do and a lead-in time to make this happen. We have worked hard as a union to push domestic energy efficiency as a key priority and worked with others to develop a strong and positive message around the use of hydrogen gas. However, it is hard to see how anything other than direct state intervention will enable the required solutions to be brought forward and delivered in a manner that works for all not just the few. Our recent engagements with the Labour Party on this subject have been more productive of late but there is still a lot of work to do. Either way we need certainty going forward and intervention now to ensure we have a legacy to leave and workers able to deliver.

**Matthew Lay,**  
**UNISON national officer for Energy**

## Protecting jobs, saving the planet

UNISON recently brought together the four major energy trade unions for the first time ever to prepare for a ‘just transition’ to clean energy

“Climate change is here. And so are its consequences.” This was the stark statement made by Benjamin Denis of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) at an energy seminar organised by UNISON last September. The event brought together around 80 rank-and-file reps and activists from the four major unions in the field: UNISON, Unite, GMB and Prospect.

Their task was to discuss the unprecedented challenges faced by the energy industry, as the world tries to move to low-carbon, zero-emission economies to mitigate the effects of climate change. And in the back of everyone’s minds was how the last major energy shift – away from coal to natural gas – led to the collapse of the coal industry and the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs. In 1980, the coal industry employed some 237,000 people. By 1990, that figure had fallen to 49,000 and by the year 2,000 just 11,000 people still worked in mining. That precipitous fall in employment devastated communities from Kent to Wearside, from South Wales to Fife.

The unions represented at the seminar are determined to make sure the same thing doesn’t happen again. We need to ensure the energy workforce is prepared for future transformations.

UNISON national officer Matthew Lay pointed out that “the concept of a ‘just’ transition appears too often to be just that: a concept. This seminar has been organised to address that by bringing together reps from the four major energy unions for the first

time ever.”

The ETUC guide on climate change for trade unions states: “Respecting the Paris mandate requires a deep and rapid change of the way we produce, move and consume.”

Benjamin Denis said: “A low-carbon, green economy can be seen as desirable for everyone if we can make sure that no-one is left behind. Anticipating these trends and their impact on workers is at the heart of trade unions’ activities. Climate change policies are not of themselves good or bad for workers – they are what we decide to make them. We want decarbonisation to be backed by a strong social agenda.”

To ensure this, retraining and reskilling of current workers will be vital. Justin Bowden from the GMB said: “We need to make sure we build in the skills and experience of our current members.” The four unions at the seminar, and the wider labour movement, have got “responsibilities to today’s workers and to the workers of tomorrow”.

Widening trade union membership to new workforces – in the renewable and high tech industries – will be vital to ensure workers’ needs are at the heart of future energy planning. “If we only defend the people in sectors where we are strong ... we might become completely irrelevant,” said Benjamin Denis. “We need to organise and unionise workers in green tech. There are no jobs on a dead planet.”

Summing up the day, Peter McIntosh of Unite confirmed that the four

unions affirmed the following three priorities already identified by the TUC. These are:

- for skilled, well-paid jobs to be at the heart of a strategy for a just transition
- for the government to step up to the plate, with among other things, a new deal for further education that would accommodate retraining in the sector
- the need to make the case for a balanced energy mix – for a diverse, affordable and safe energy supply.

To download a copy of the ETUC handbook, Involving trade unions in climate action to build a just transition, visit: [www.bit.ly/ETUCclimateaction](http://www.bit.ly/ETUCclimateaction)

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**“We want climate change to be backed by a strong social agenda”**

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## Energy's future workforce

- Planning for the future, the seminar agreed the following proposals:
- The need for a long-term and cohesive energy policy, including community support structures and future investment.
- Full consultation with, and involvement of, the workforce in developing a balanced energy policy.
- Making sure the views of union members are central to planning.
- Informing the public and winning public support.
- The creation of an energy council to bring together all stakeholders.
- The establishment within companies of formal works councils, with union reps on board to oversee ethical supply chains.
- Clarification of what 'a just transition' means – what are the effects down the line?

## Global warming – the headline figures

- The Paris Agreement in 2015 saw governments commit themselves to keeping global warming to no more than 2°C.
- 2°C is the level which many scientists see as the tipping point – pass that and global warming could spiral out of control and become irreversible, leading to a 'hothouse earth'.
- To have any chance of keeping global warming to 2°C, the global community needs to become carbon neutral by the second half of this century.
- The increase in emissions between 1970 and 2010 was the highest in human history.
- 70% of Europe's energy is produced by burning fossil fuels.
- Europe's carbon emissions have fallen by 1% a year since 1990. But to reach carbon neutrality by 2060-70, the rate of reduction needs to triple to 3% a year.

**“There are no jobs on a dead planet”**



## UK Power Networks sign up to the UNISON call centre charter

UK Power Networks has become the latest major utility company in the UK to sign up to the UNISON call centre charter, renamed the Service Delivery Centre Charter to reflect the name UKPN use for their call centre in Fore Hamlet, Ipswich.

On 13<sup>th</sup> November, Sam Fuller, head of customer service for UK Power Networks, and Carol Lewis, full-time officer for UNISON, met at Fore Hamlet to sign up to the charter. UK Power Networks' call centre services are currently in-house and UKPN is committed to remaining the number one in-house call centre in the region.

UK Power Networks and UNISON are fully signed up to improving the



working environment for all workers engaged in the Service Delivery Centre, which takes calls covering London, Eastern and South Eastern England. The charter is based on academic research from Portsmouth University commissioned by UNISON, which demonstrated that, despite advances in working

conditions, problems remained for the many thousands engaged in this type of work. We are therefore determined to drive forward a decency agenda allowing members to work efficiently in a safe environment.

As a leading employer of call handling staff; UK Power Networks can help set the agenda for both a progressive working environment for staff and one which offers customers a higher standard of service. The charter itself sets out some clear principles that the signatories

will adopt to improve working environments and recognise the specific needs of contact/call centre work. It is an area of work that UNISON is leading on across the utility sector.

## UNISON responds to British Gas pension consultation – work longer, pay more and get less

Although not involved in any negotiations on the proposed British Gas pension changes, UNISON has taken the opportunity to fully respond to the statutory consultation British Gas has had to facilitate. In summarising our response we made it clear that UNISON remains unconvinced over the business case rationale for change and we are hugely disappointed that we

are being consulted on detrimental changes that amount to work longer, pay more and get less. We want the business to protect our members in the CPP and CRIS schemes and recognise that our members are some of the lowest paid workers in the business and yet they are being asked to take on an unfair burden of cost reduction. For the avoidance of any doubt we welcomed the

commitment to provide a form of defined benefit pension scheme for our CPP and CRIS members, but the fact remains this must provide a good quality pension benefit at an affordable cost. We very much hope that the business will listen to us on the points raised in our submission.

## We did it – pension, pay and job package for E:ON workers

After 18 months of drawn out negotiations, UNISON and the three other recognised national trade unions at the company worked collectively to negotiate a much-improved pension, pay and jobs package with E:ON that was accepted by members and passed all balloting thresholds.

UNISON's national officer for energy Matthew Lay, said: "The joint unions – UNISON, Unite, GMB and Prospect were pleased with the final outcome and grateful to all members, reps and convenors for their support and patience throughout the lengthy negotiations and the ballot period."

The negotiations originally focused on pensions and measures to address the E:ON pension deficit. This currently stands at around £1 billion. As the negotiations progressed, the unions expanded the remit to include employment security in the UK and a simple, across-the-board pay offer,

which is higher than it would have been if the unions had negotiated separately.

The unions were also keen to ensure that members consenting to any pension changes would have some employment stability for the next few years. This resulted in E:ON making a set of employment commitments which include:

- employing the majority of the workforce in the UK with no further outsourcing of jobs – other than those already announced to the unions

- carrying out any job reductions required on a voluntary basis and the current severance terms remaining unchanged
- meaningful consultation with the trade unions at the earliest point on any changes.

"This is a complex deal and was only possible because of active trade unions in the workplace," continued Matt. "The overall outcome is a testament to the strength of the trade unions within E.ON and a reminder to always be a member"

### The deal

The agreement reached included the following:

#### Pensions

**On the deficit.** The unions accepted that Defined Benefit (DB) funding costs running at 47% was not sustainable. We negotiated a position which preserved the DB scheme and the Retirement Balance (RB) from possible scheme closure and going forward we substantially improved the offer made by E:ON last year.

**On contributions.** E:ON wanted a 5% increase across the board to the pension scheme and the removal of the higher bands in the RB plan. Now there will be no contribution increases for members in the DB scheme.

**On Pensionable Salary Caps.** E:ON sought a flat cap of 1% on all salary grades. (A salary cap is the amount your pensionable salary can grow – not your actual salary.) We have improved the salary cap to grow up to the rate of the CPI (consumer price index). An upper limit of 3% will be fully pensionable on salaries below £70k.



**The future.** We are seeking to improve the overall pension savings of all members and we are proposing an automatic upward movement of contributions.

#### Pay

Subject to getting the pension deal agreed, E:ON has agreed to make a two-year simple pay offer to all staff covered by collective agreements. This offer was worth:

- Year 1: 3.5% on salaries, points, allowances and so on backdated to 1 April 2018
- Year 2: 3% or average CPI whichever is greater, paid 1 April 2019.

## Transgender at work – what the law says

Transgender workers face high levels of prejudice in the workplace. This is not acceptable and needs to be challenged.

The Equality Act 2010 says that all workers have the right to the same opportunities and the right to be treated fairly and with respect in the workplace. It also says that workers are entitled to 'reasonable adjustments' to make this possible.

At UNISON's recent energy conference in Sheffield, there was a presentation by UNISON reps Penny Smith and Emma Procter about upholding the rights of transgender workers.

"If you are transgender or work with someone who is, then it is very important that you're aware of your rights so that any unfavourable treatment at work can be challenged," said Penny Smith. "A lot of people put up with less favourable treatment or harassment, hoping that it will stop. But it usually won't stop until someone takes action."

It is not necessary for trans workers to have a medical diagnosis or treatment to gain this protection. It is the right of every individual to be able

to work with dignity and respect and to contribute to the workforce to their full ability – however they identify.

Unlawful discrimination may include: not being offered employment, being offered less favourable terms and conditions; having fewer opportunities for promotion or training; or even dismissal.

Other forms of discrimination can include: feeling humiliated by fellow workers; being subjected to unwanted comments; ignored or excluded.

If you think you are being discriminated against because you are transgender, or because someone thinks you are, you must take action.

The first step is to start keeping a record of incidents. You should also:

- talk to your UNISON representative
- talk to the person who is discriminating against you or ask

someone else to talk to them

- raise an informal grievance using your employer's grievance procedure. The complaint could be taken to an employment tribunal, but you should be aware that short time limits exist. When bringing claims to the employment tribunal, there is generally a time limit of three months less one day from the act being complained about. (In Northern Ireland, the time limit is three months exactly.) Note that following your employer's grievance procedure does not extend time limits.



### What does transgender mean?

In the UK, transgender or trans people is a commonly used umbrella term to describe people whose gender identity differs from that they were labelled with at birth.

Some people do not feel comfortable thinking of themselves as simply either male or female and reject the traditional idea of there being two genders.

Every trans person is unique in how they view themselves and experience their lives.

For those who undergo gender reassignment or transition, the medical and surgical procedures can take months or years to complete.

Some people have no interest at all in undergoing gender reassignment. Others may wish to partially transition.

For more information about UNISON and transgender policies visit: [www.bit.ly/UNISONtransgender](http://www.bit.ly/UNISONtransgender)

### The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 aims to ensure everyone is treated equally in the workplace, regardless of:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership status
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion and belief
- sex and sexual orientation.

## Get the message

How do you communicate in the workplace? And how can we all work better together to improve workplace rights and conditions?

How do you connect with people at work? Apart from chatting with colleagues, there's a good chance you use email, probably the work intranet and if you work in a call centre or out in the field, the phone is key to doing your job.

When it comes to communicating within UNISON – or with any other organisation you're involved with for that matter – it becomes more complicated. Do you like to stay in touch by email? Do you regularly check Facebook or Messenger? Do you still value printed materials – for example newsletters like this one, or letters in the post?

All forms of communication have their pros and cons. And at UNISON

we know that finding the right one for you and for all UNISON members is essential if we are to protect your rights at work efficiently and effectively.

Technology now enables us all to keep in touch, to campaign, to inform and promote activities at the touch of a button in so many different ways. However, reps are very busy and do not always have time to engage with new technology and social media. We need your help.

### How you can help

Are you a regular social media user? Do you know how to set up a Facebook page, run a Twitter or Instagram account?

Do you have an hour or so a week to help support your UNISON rep to promote activities, keep members informed or help share some good news stories about UNISON members on social media?

If so, get in touch with your local rep. They would love to hear from you. UNISON has a range of Facebook and Twitter resources online to support online interest and engagement.

UNISON Energy staff also has its own dedicated facebook page which is updated with regular items of news from the energy world.

Log on and get involved today. UNISON needs you. Working together – we are stronger.



## Are you under 30? Then read this...



If you are 30 or under, there's a good chance you have student debt, cannot afford to buy your own home, have low wages and job insecurity. There is also a good chance that you have no voice at work.

secure protection at work for future generations, it is a moral imperative.

So if you are under 30 and you are a UNISON member or would like to be one – get in touch with your UNISON rep. Young workers are

At UNISON, we are committed to fighting for the rights of young members. This is why UNISON has voted to make 2019 the year of young workers. Considering the working conditions young workers face and the need to

one of the union's fastest growing demographics.

In 2019, we shall be reaching out to young workers through our live campaign. Talk to your UNISON rep about how to get hold of postcards, T-shirts, and posters.

Visit UNISON's Youtube channel at: [www.youtube.com/user/UNISONTV/](http://www.youtube.com/user/UNISONTV/) videos and see stories featuring young workers, apprentices and UNISON campaigns.

This is a live campaign. We will add new resources and announce activities and events on this webpage.

**Spread the word and share: [unison.org.uk/organisingyoungworkers](http://unison.org.uk/organisingyoungworkers)**

## Michael Jeram trophy award

At this year's Energy seminar in Sheffield the Mike Jeram trophy was presented to the Cadent Gas branch for the biggest numerical increase in membership in the 12 month to the end of Oct 2018. This was a great success for the branch which has only really existed for just over this length of time since de merging from the East Midlands Gas Southern Branch. The branch looks after members working for Cadent Gas in the East Midlands. Cadent gas itself was spun out of National Grid when it decided to offload its gas distribution business. The hard work since they were formed has really paid off and they have been adding members in nearly every month since. Tejinder Riat and Ali Akhtar were present at the seminar to collect the award.

The second winners of the night were the Eastern Energy Branch who won the award for the Energy branch which added the biggest % increase in membership over the past 12 months. This was the second year running Eastern Energy had been awarded this accolade and is a tremendous achievement for all involved with the branch.



## Miriam Latona – proud to be an activist

As branch secretary for National Grid Energy, and a member of the Energy service group executive, Miriam Latona is a keen fighter for members' rights



his condition as short-term sickness when it should have been counted as long-term. Because he had so much time off, he was put through the short-term sickness process and HR offered him six weeks salary to leave the business. He rejected that offer and we went to a review panel, where I asked that he be given a chance to manage his sickness and do the job which he was ready to do. The panel decided to give him another chance and put further support in place. When National Grid reorganised, the voluntary redundancy payment was enhanced, and he decided to take it. With UNISON's support he got a much better deal than he would have if he had accepted the original offer from HR.

### Q: How did you first become involved with UNISON?

My mother is a nurse and she was in a union. As a child, I remember every single month the union magazine would come through the door. I didn't know what it was all about then but when I was in my first job I was drawn to join the union, which was UNISON.

The reason I became more active in UNISON was because I'm a strong believer in fighting for my rights and other people's – and that's what unions are about.

### Q: What do you enjoy most about your current union role?

One particular case I'm proud of is that of a member who had a serious illness and had to take a lot of time off sick. National Grid classified

### Q: What's the most important issue facing members today?

The issue I feel most passionate about at the moment is that of the women in their 50s and 60s who have been hit by the government's decision to increase the female state pension age from 60 to 66. My mum is in that age group so it touches me deeply. I am following their campaign, Women Against State Pension Inequality, with great interest.

### Q: What is your job at National Grid?

A: I'm a technical standards officer. My role is technical secretary of the Gas Engineering Policy Implementation Group (GEPiG). That involves managing technical standards in the gas transmission business, as well as dealing with technical queries from the operations side.

### Q: How do you relax when not at work?

I like cooking, eating and spending time with my four-year-old son, friends and family. My mum is really proud of my union work – she is a union member, but I've taken it one step further by being an activist. I hope my son will follow in my footsteps.

## Have your say

Do you have any stories, opinions or photos you would like to share with other members in the water, environment and transport sector? If so, we would love to hear from you.

Please contact Andrew Dobbie, national officer:  
a.dobbie@unison.co.uk

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Annual salary	Monthly cost
Up to £2,000	£1.30
£2,001 - £5,000	£3.50
£5,001 - £8,000	£5.30
£8,001 - £11,000	£6.60
£11,001 - £14,000	£7.85
£14,001 - £17,000	£9.70
£17,001 - £20,000	£11.50
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