



RECORD OF DECISIONS

2019 National Women's Conference

Bournemouth

**2019 National Women's Conference
Decisions**

- M1 Bargaining for Carers**
- M2 Caring About Women Carers in the workplace**
- M3 Social care cuts and how it impacts women**
- M4 Campaigning for Safety within the Social Care Workforce**
- M5 End Discrimination in State Reciprocal Pension Arrangements for Black women**
- M6 Support the Backto60.com Campaign**
- M7 Black women in senior positions in the workplace – Breaking the barriers**
- M8 Women’s Employment and Learning in the workplace**
- M9 Women’s Health, Safety and Wellbeing in the Workplace**
- M10 Call it out! Supporting young women to challenge workplace sexual harassment**
- M11 Improving Women Workers Protection Against Sexual Harrassment**
- M12 ASK FOR ANGELA - IT COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE**
- M13 Understanding Maternity Rights**
- M14 Universal Childcare**
- M15 Free Childcare for working women to enable TRUE development of equality within the workplace**
- M16 Women and debt**
- M17 Young Women and Student Loan Repayments**
- M18 Promoting Development of Women Activists**
- M19 Making our women history**
- M20 We Are Still Standing**
- M21 MAKING THE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER (LGBT) GROUP FULLY INCLUSIVE OF WOMEN'S IDENTITIES**
- M22 Support for women’s self organisation; lost voices**
- M23 Protecting, extending and enforcing disabled women’s rights**
- M24 Sex Discrimination Law**
- M25 Period necessity, not a Luxury**
- M26 Period Pain**
- M27 Time to talk about menstrual health**
- M28 SECURING REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS**
- M29 Menopause and the workplace**
- M30 Miscarriage is not an illness**
- M31 Supporting women after stillbirth**
- M32 Abortion Rights**
- M33 Abortion Clinic Buffer Zones**

**2019 National Women's Conference
Decisions**

- M34 Domestic Violence – Time for UNISON to Take Action**
- M35 Football and the rise of domestic violence**
- M36 Misogyny and domestic abuse experienced by disabled women**
- M37 No to Islamophobia, Defend A Woman’s Right To Choose What She Wears**
- M38 SHOW TRANSPHOBIA THE RED CARD**
- M39 Educational exclusion and the disproportionate impact on girls**
- M40 Organising Against the Odds**

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

Motions

1. Bargaining for Carers

Carried

This conference applauds the recent publication by UNISON of the BARGAINING ON CARERS POLICIES: How branches can benefit from bargaining on carers rights at work

The Carers Trust defines a carer as “anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support”. And that caring role may happen overnight with someone close to you suddenly taken ill, or else it may be a more gradual commitment, as elderly or disabled loved ones need help to continue to live independently.

Many people, whether out of necessity or choice rely on unpaid carers, many, if not most of whom are women family members. As well as caring for adult dependants, our women members may be struggling with balancing their work commitments with caring for their children and grandchildren.

The UNISON document gives up to date information and statistics about how carers are disadvantaged by the absence of good workplace policies

Caring responsibilities are a key reason that workers request flexible working or special leave but too often these are refused. Carers may also experience unfair treatment at work that could be discriminatory.

There are estimated to be 4.27 million carers of working age living in the UK; 2.44 million (57%) of these are women and 1.83 million (43%) are men, so this is an issue that disproportionately affects women.

These caring responsibilities may be wide ranging and include (but are not limited to):

- personal care
- help with the dependant's mobility
- assistance with the management of medication
- emotional support
- practical support such as housework, help with financial matters and
- administration

Around 2 million people have given up their work to care, driven from the workplace because their work life balance is just too difficult.

Even more women have reduced their working hours, in order to continue their caring responsibilities, taking an immediate reduction in pay and potentially facing a future with a poverty pension.

For those women carers still managing to work, the issue is too often hidden and carers in the workplace can particularly experience:

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

- a feeling of loneliness or isolation as a result of their caring responsibilities
- a feeling that colleagues and managers don't understand the impact of caring
- a fear of talking about their caring responsibilities in case they are then treated less favourably

The Work and Pensions select committee reports that "Carers are too often "nervous?, even "fearful? of discussing their circumstances with their employer. Stigma still exists".

The peak age for caring is between 50 and 64 years of age, carers may therefore likely to be among the most skilful and experienced employees, those that are the hardest for employers to quickly replace.

The new UNISON guidance is really easy to read with lots of information and ideas for branches to negotiate improvements in local policies and procedures that if agreed and implemented, could significantly improve the working lives of many of our women members who have caring responsibilities.

Conference, we commend this new guidance to you and ask that you take a copy home with you; that you talk to your branch committee about the document and what improvements could be negotiated with your employer. The guidance even includes a model carers policy, so most of the work on putting together an employer's policy has already been done.

UNISON campaigns on negotiating improvement in carers policies can be really successful, raising the profile of the branch, increasing membership, letting women carers know that they are not forgotten and most importantly, when implemented, the policy will be making the lives of our working carers just that little bit easier. Conference this guidance is a vital document for use in supporting women members and it cannot be allowed to sit on a shelf in any branch office unused.

Conference therefore asks the National Women's Committee to;

1. Publicise and provide a link to the "BARGAINING ON CARERS POLICIES: How branches can benefit from bargaining on carers rights at work" document on their page of the UNISON national website.
2. Work with all necessary sectors and departments within UNISON to promote both the availability and contents of the document as widely as possible to our members.

2. Caring About Women Carers in the workplace

Carried

This Conference Notes that:

It is recognised that the role of women in society has changed dramatically because the changes to The State Pension Age has forced most women to continue working for an extra 6 years.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

Statistics show that around 3.34 million women are carers and many women find themselves having caring responsibilities for not just children but for their own parents and other family members.

Many of these women are part of the 'Sandwich Generation'. They are juggling work and caring responsibilities, often with little support from the state and their employer. Added to the 'Sandwich Generation' is a dramatic increase of younger, adult women who are juggling care with work and/or studying.

Within the public sector, employers may have policies to support the workforce. However, the right to ask to work flexibly is simply the right to ask, there is no guarantee that vital support and time off will be given.

Conference asks the National Women's Committee to:

1. Raise awareness of the issues facing women in the workplace who have caring responsibilities
2. Carry out a survey to establish the number of women members who are carers and who they care for
3. Provide information to branches on negotiating policies for carers that include short term situations such as end of life care and ensure that they are treated with dignity and respect
4. Work with the Carers Trust and Carers UK to improve support services for our women members who are carers.

3. Social care cuts and how it impacts women

Carried as Amended: 3.1

The current cuts to our NHS and social care provision are causing great health poverty to women and families. Social care is the very bedrock of our society, women bear the brunt of the care crisis. The majority of the care workforce, paid and unpaid, are women, and the majority of those in need of care are women. These cuts impact negatively on women in innumerable different ways, with a disproportionate impact on members of disadvantaged groups including Black, disabled and LGBT women.

The budgetary constraints and issues highlighted in social media are decimating frontline services. Also, potential risks of early intervention strategies are being minimised leaving only emergency provision which is so poorly funded; thereby leaving many families unsupported until crisis intervention is the only action that can be taken.

"Health services, particularly the NHS, have borne significant and damaging budget cuts as a result of Tory austerity. From 2015-2016, the public health budget was cut by £200m, a gap set to grow to £331m by 2021." (Care Council 2017).

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

Research by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (Adass) reports that, "English councils plan to push through social care cuts of £700m in 2018-19, equivalent to nearly 5% of the total £14.5bn budget. Since 2010, social care spending in England has shrunk by £7bn." (The Guardian newspaper, June 2018).

In these austere times it is not only the patients of the NHS that are suffering cuts to Social Care provision; it has also affected both staff and other service users:

- The loss of staff has affected the consistency of social care support, and has also directly impacted the knowledge base in relation to women's and LGBT women's issues;
- The loss of services for many high need complex service users
- Continual promises from the government that funding will increase, which never materialise;
- The loss of mental health support, which often has a direct physical health consequences;
- The loss of access to GPs, and to gender identity clinics, which disproportionately affects trans women;
- Increased stress for both staff and service users as providers focus on surviving instead of providing a quality service.

According to Glen Garrod, President of Adass, "action to address immediate pressures faced by councils and care providers is becoming increasingly urgent." (The Guardian newspaper, June 2018)

The budget announcement in 2018 promised 3.6%, but failed to account for increasing costs that will need to be met by the Department for Health and Social Care's existing budget. This will mean a real terms increase of just 2.7%, and this applies only to the NHS. There is still no commitment to ensuring Social Care provision is protected and that proper funding will be forthcoming.

Our members and services need to be protected from further Tory attacks.

Conference therefore calls upon the National Women's Committee to work with the:

1. NEC and Labour Link Committee to challenge the funding cuts building on existing campaigns;
2. NEC to campaign nationally for a Social Care policy commensurate with a caring society and a National Care Service that provides care free at the point of delivery.
3. The other national self-organised groups to identify areas of common concern and potential areas of joint campaigning on these issues."
4. **Campaigning for Safety within the Social Care Workforce**

Carried

Conference notes that women make up over 3/4 of the Health and Social Care Workforce, with an even larger proportion of women directly delivering care to service users within a home care environment.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

The experiences of nurses and care workers who provide health and social care at home have focused very much on the scandals of low pay, not enough time to do the job and other operational aspects of the role. Whilst this campaigning work is vital, it is important not to miss out on the other ways that women can be put at risk whilst carrying out caring roles.

Conference believes that women providing care, in the home environment are at risk of not only physical and verbal assault but also sexual assault. As employers try and cut the costs of providing services, workers safety can be put at risk by reducing staffing levels or not fully risk assessing service user homes.

Conference further notes that employers have a duty of care to support staff who are providing these services. Violence has a major impact on whether someone is able to attend work.

Conference recognises that closer working between health and social care should mean that it should be easier to share information about service users between agencies and believe that appropriate data sharing agreements should be prioritised in order to promote safety of this female workforce.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to work with Regional Women's Groups to produce campaign materials for members who work in home based care on personal safety, the importance of risk assessments and how to say no to managers who ask staff to compromise their safety

5. End Discrimination in State Reciprocal Pension Arrangements for Black women

Carried as Amended: 5.1

Conference is seriously concerned that Black women workers face a triple whammy of discrimination in the Labour market,

- disadvantage in getting decent and well paid jobs
- destitution in retirement caused by low pay, an ethnic and racial pay gap
- lack of access to good occupational pensions.

This is additionally heightened if you are a woman due to maternity leave and caring responsibilities, where career breaks have had to be taken and reduced hours negotiated in order to balance such caring responsibilities, women still largely being seen as the main carer, thus reducing their national insurance contributions and as a consequence, "pension pot".

Conference believes that the Reciprocal Pension Arrangements impacts disproportionately on people who are Black retiring and from predominantly Commonwealth countries. The UK State Pension is already a pittance compared to other developed countries. There should be no discrimination against people who work in Britain and have paid into the National Insurance Scheme and the country in which they chose to reside. Entitlement to the annual increase in state pension should be paid on the basis of pension contributions and not on the country where

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

you chose to retire. Black women worldwide are still concentrated in lowest paid occupations and predominate precarious work.

Citizens of 30 EEA countries, Gibraltar and Switzerland will keep their entitlement if they move between those countries. This means that if you live in the EEA countries, Gibraltar and Switzerland and you receive a state pension – you will get an increase in your state pension every year. But if you live in any of the 47 Commonwealth countries (except Barbados, Bermuda, Jamaica and Mauritius) your pension will be frozen at the rate and date of your retirement if you live outside the EU or EEA countries.

Conference calls on the National women's Committee to work with the National Black members committee:

1. And the Retired Members Committee and the UNISON Pensions Unit to prepare an action plan to raise awareness of this issue and publish the facts on the UNISON website and within any appropriate in house women's publications .
2. To lobby to end this discriminatory application of the state pensions increases between people choosing to retire in the EU, EEA and Commonwealth countries, recognising the plight of black women of the union who statistics tell us are still the most likely to join a union.
3. To produce a campaign and training pack on this issue.
4. To note the work of WASPI, heavily supported by UNISON, and make recommendations as to how they can incorporate the experiences of Black women within their work which this conference believes is currently under-represented.

6. Support the Backto60.com Campaign

Carried

Under the 1995 Pensions Act a timetable was drawn up to equalise the age at which men and women could draw the state pension.

In the 2011 Pensions Act the new qualifying age of 65 for women was brought forward to 2018, a move that has seen 3.9 million 1950's women lose out. The 2011 Act also accelerated the state pension rises, adding a further year to women's state pension age from 65 to 66.

Conservative MP's have stated that equalisation of state pension ages was a requirement of EU law - this is not the case. Article 7 of the EU directive specifically states that the determination of the state pension age is the right of member states. A 2007 European Commission report confirmed that different state pension ages are allowed and are common place across the EU. EU law allows for different state pension ages and long transitional arrangements.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

In a March 2015 report on 'Communication of State Pension age changes', the Work and Pensions Select Committee concluded that "more could and should have been done" to communicate the changes and called on the Government to "explore the option of permitting a defined group of women who have been affected by state pension age changes to take early retirement, from a specified age, on an "actuarially neutral basis".

The Government argues that the changes in the 2011 Act were debated at length and a decision made by Parliament, as part of which a concession was made to limit the impact on those most affected. It says it will "make no further changes to the pension age or pay financial redress in lieu of a pension."

As a direct result of the above, several campaign groups have been established and stand defiantly against the inequality and unfair treatment of women born in the 1950s who will experience changes to their state pension age.

The biggest of these campaign groups with approximately 738,000 supporters is the Backto60.com campaign group.

The Backto60 for 1950s Women campaign group argues that while the 1995 Conservative government's Pension Act included plans to increase the women's state pension age to 65 – the same as men's – the changes were implemented unfairly, with little or no personal notice, leaving women with no time to make alternative plans and devastating consequences for many.

In any event, 1950s Women had 'contracted in' for a state pension at 60 despite some 'contracting out' of SERPS, at intervals. It had been woven into the fabric of society based on the lifelong inequities 1950s Women faced due to pay gaps.

The objective of the Backto60 campaign group is to ensure that the state pension age be kept at 60 for women born in the 1950's.

This objective has been dismissed by the government leaving no option other than to seek a judicial review of the governments implementation and tapering of the pensions changes.

BackTo60's claim was lodged at the High Court against the Department for Work and Pensions on 30 July 2018. The world class legal team is led by Michael Mansfield QC at Nexus Chambers.

The move is the culmination of action taken by the group which now involves support on the issue from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which raised the issue at the United Nations, the Fawcett Society and other campaigners. A professor of Feminist Law will shortly provide an Amicus Brief that discusses alarming breaches of CEDAW Articles.

Whilst the Backto60 campaign group is the largest of its kind, it finds itself being excluded from democratic procedures due to fundamental policy differences between itself and other campaigning bodies: £271bn is missing from the National Insurance Fund and the latter is still abundantly full.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

The Backto60 campaign group is very clear that it will accept nothing less than a return to 60 of state pension age for 1950s Women.

Conference calls upon the National Women's Committee to work with the NEC and other relevant bodies in UNISON to use whatever means possible to:

1. Support the objectives of the Backto60 campaign;
2. Work with the Backto60 campaign, where appropriate, to campaign for a fair deal for women and encourage regions, branches and members to make links with their local Backto60 campaign;
3. Develop information leaflets and a briefing sheet so that branch women's officer and branches can raise awareness of the Backto60 campaign and encourage support at a local level and in particular with employers; and
4. To provide feedback to the 2020 Women Members Conference on progress.

7. Black women in senior positions in the workplace – Breaking the barriers **Carried**

Conference believes that Black women are still hugely under-represented in senior roles at work. Research has shown that positions of power in every sector of society are dominated by men.

Research conducted by Operation Black Vote and the Guardian newspaper found that only 3.5% of Black people are at the top of UK's leading 1000 plus organisations, compared with 12.9% in the general population. This under-representation is more profound when broken down into gender, with less than a quarter of those positions being held by Black women.

In a review of race in the workplace, it was found that Black people are much more likely to be overqualified for their jobs than their white counterparts, who often advance up the ladder of promotion with ease. In other words, Black talent is not necessarily lacking in abundance but it is seriously lacking in recognition and support.

According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), one in eight of the working age population is from a Black background, yet they occupy only one in sixteen of top management positions.

Women still face cultural and social barriers to career progression, including a lack of formal support or organisational policies to help them progress and to tackle harmful attitudes and gender stereotyping.

Existing barriers to women achieving senior positions also include: perceptions about women's potential; an absence of role models; careers information and guidance; career breaks; caring responsibilities; full time working being the existing norm; a lack of talent spotting; and a lack of mentoring.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

This is even more so for Black women who often face the double barrier of the gender glass ceiling and racial discrimination. This is particularly evident when looking at management roles.

The Gender and Race Benchmark 2014 found that Black women are the least likely group to hold executive or non-executive directorship positions.

Statistics show that Black women are twice as likely as white women to be leaders in their community – leading a youth initiative, heading up a community or charity organisation. Black women are also more likely to be the primary breadwinners in their families but their experience outside of work falls off the radar of 'management at work'.

There is a serious issue with the lack of Black women representation in senior roles and the evidence is clear that Black people especially Black women continue to be under-represented at senior levels at work.

Conference calls on the national women's Committee, working with relevant service groups where appropriate to:

- 1 Raise employers' awareness of the disproportionately low number of Black women in senior positions, and encourage employers to address this situation with suitable mentoring and training to enable Black women to reach their full potential at their workplace;
- 2 Utilise the challenging racism in the workplace toolkit and work with the National Black Members Committee to examine employers recruitment and retention policies and highlight this disparity, thereby enabling UNISON representatives to challenge blatant discrimination;
- 3 Work with UNISON Learning and Organising Services to educate and support Black women members to increase their confidence to access the structures within their workplace in order to make progress in their career;
- 4 Encourage the service groups to develop guidance and policies on supporting Black women in the workplace and to place equalities at the heart of the bargaining agenda

8. Women's Employment and Learning in the workplace

Carried

Conference notes the strong evidence that cuts to the public sector affect women more than men. 65% of public service workers are women and almost a quarter of working women are in public sector jobs.

Job cuts, pay freezes and changes to terms and conditions in the public sector are impacting more on women than men and more jobs will be in jeopardy as a result of cuts in the next few years; austerity in the public sector has not ended, and there are already 1.1 million women out of work.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

Women's roles have changed dramatically over recent years and they are juggling a disproportionate amount of challenges, this is especially true of lower paid workers. For example being the primary earner in the family, being expected to work longer due to pension inequality or having the majority of carer responsibilities.

Another major factor is the Digitalisation agenda and the fact that a significant proportion of our members have previously been excluded. Due to job cuts and restructures this lack of knowledge and digital skills seriously disadvantages Women members in the current competitive employment market. As primary carers for children this may also have an effect on being able to monitor and promote safety online within the home.

Anna Bird, acting chief executive of the Fawcett Society has said "Women have not faced a greater threat to their financial security and rights in living memory. Decades of steady, albeit slow, progress on equality for women is being dismantled, as cuts to women's jobs and the benefits and services they rely on turn back time on women's equality"

UNISON are best placed to support workplace learning with Shop Stewards and ULRs present in many workplaces, they have the opportunity to meet with members and understand what training is required. If there is greater access to learning and development this would enable Women members to gain more confidence and skills, and therefore increase opportunities. It is vital that UNISON grasp these opportunities and lead the way on this with employers.

Within UNISON there are excellent learning programmes and there are many learning agreements in place with Employers. However, continued pressure on Employers is required to be able to negotiate the time off that is vital to be able to access learning in the workplace.

Women's commitments and responsibilities do not finish at the end of the working day as they may still be primary carers for children or relatives or may have other jobs. Therefore it is very important to reach out to women, especially lower paid women, and offer appropriate support within the workplace to participate in a range of learning opportunities.

Conference calls on the Women's Committee to:

- Encourage branches to negotiate with employers to provide learning agreements that actively support women, particularly lower paid women, to take up these opportunities,
- Support branches to ensure that learning agreements include specific items that take account of low paid women and women carers' needs, e.g. release within the working day,
- Work with UNISON'S Learning and Organising Services Team to provide materials to promote online safety for women members.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

9. Women's Health, Safety and Wellbeing in the Workplace

Carried

Conference congratulates the National Women's Committee for 25 years of policy development and campaigning on women's health, safety and wellbeing. Progress on this area of work is vital for working women and should remain a key priority for the National Women's Committee and UNISON.

To enable women activists to access and share the knowledge and information available, conference requests that the National Women's Committee establish a database based website containing information relating to:

- 1 Details of support groups and campaigning organisations,
- 2 Women's health, safety and wellbeing information and;
- 3 National and local workplace policies affecting women's health, safety and wellbeing.

The types of information should include the menopause, endometriosis, breast cancer, undergoing cancer treatment, pelvic organ prolapse and any other relevant medical conditions. Factsheets for downloading, printing and sharing on Regional and Branch websites and via Social media.

This information can be used to heighten awareness of the issues affecting women's health, safety and wellbeing and will help to influence negotiation at all levels in UNISON.

The database based website should be in place within 6 months of this conference.

10. Call it out! Supporting young women to challenge workplace sexual harassment

Carried

#MeToo has transformed the debate around sexual harassment, with cases being reported in the media more than ever before. UNISON needs to ensure that the voices of working women are highlighted in the #MeToo debate, and that young women know UNISON can support them in cases of sexual harassment.

The Young Women's Trust found in 2018 that 24% of young women would be reluctant to report sexual harassment at work for fear of losing their jobs. A further 15% of young women had been sexually harassed at work and not reported it. Only 8% of women who experienced sexual harassment said they had reported the incident. 17% are worried they would be offered fewer hours if they reported sexual harassment.

Worryingly, 32% of young women said they did not know how to report sexual harassment in their organisation.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

UNISON, as the union with over 1 million women, needs to lead the way with challenging sexual harassment, and empowering branches and young women members to do so. By developing innovative work in this area, UNISON can pioneer and champion unions as a place for support when sexual harassment occurs.

This Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to:

- Work with the National Young Member's Forum to develop a 'Call It Out!' campaign, aimed at young women in UNISON; liaising with appropriate external organisations such as NUS
- Work with appropriate bodies within UNISON to conduct research of women in UNISON and the sexual harassment they experience, in order to develop toolkits for branches that are reflective of the different sectors we represent
- Work with Labour Link to raise with MPs the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace.
- Liaise with the NEC to make this a strategic priority with respect to recruitment and organising of young women.

11. Improving Women Workers Protection Against Sexual Harassment

Carried as Amended: 11.1

Conference recognises the work that UNISON has undertaken on the issues of sexual harassment, particularly the joint research in 2018 with the London School of Economics and Political Science and the University of Surrey on the levels of sexual harassment in the police force.

Sexual harassment in the workplace is nothing new. Attacks against women take place in the street and in our workplace not just in Hollywood. The recent #MeToo campaign has started a debate about unwanted sexual conduct and has empowered women to come forward.

In addition to a 2016 TUC study which found that 52% of women had experienced unwanted behaviour at work including groping, sexual advances and inappropriate jokes; a recent survey by the TUC found that 7% of women who had experienced harassment reported that the perpetrator was a 'third-party person'. In support of these findings, research carried out by the BBC showed that between five and 8% who had experienced harassment was due to a client or customer and 16% of verbal sexual advances were perpetrated by a third party.

Section.40 of the Equality Act 2010 made the position clear on third party harassment. If harassment had previously occurred on two occasions and the employer was aware of it, but failed to take reasonable steps to prevent it from happening again – known as the "three-strikes rule" – then the employer could be held liable. The harassment did not need to be by the same third party or be of the same nature. However, the Coalition Government repealed this section in the Equalities Act which would have offered direct protection to workers against third-party harassment, including sexual harassment.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

The government claimed that other legislation could bring about similar protection and that someone may be able to bring a claim for third party harassment under the general harassment provisions in the Equality Act 2010 (Section 26 (1)). However, in a Court of Appeal ruling involving Unite the Union and Nailard, it was established that third-party harassment would not be covered by the Equalities Act, except in very limited and specific circumstances. This means that employers are unlikely to be liable if they do not adequately protect against third party sexual harassment.

The fifth report on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace by UK Parliament Women's And Equalities Committee, states they believe a new protection must be put in place, to cover new and repeated cases of harassment by third parties. Conference believes that the original Section 40 of the Equality Act 2010 needs to be reinstated.

Conference also believes that we must ensure that our activists and branch officers are equipped to support women who wish to report sexual harassment at work.

Conference is aware that many women will not raise a formal complaint until some considerable time has passed. Complaints of sexual harassment will usually only be considered at an employment tribunal if the worker makes a claim within three months of when the last incident took place. Consequently, many historic allegations are effectively time barred from being heard at an Employment Tribunal.

Conference calls upon the National Women's Committee to work with the appropriate UNISON committees, Labour Link and external bodies to;

1. Campaign for the reinstatement of Section 40 of the Equality Act on 'third party protection'.
2. Campaign for an extension of time limits in Sexual Harassment cases similar to the time limits currently applied in Equal Pay cases
3. Continue support for the #MeToo and #Timesup campaigns
4. Develop a toolkit for activists and branch officers that includes:
 - a) Guidance on negotiating a sexual harassment policy, including a template policy
 - b) Advise for branches on how to support members who report sexual harassment in the workplace;
 - c) Information on external agencies that branches can signpost victims to for expert support and counselling outside of the workplace.
5. Work with Learning and Organising Services to provide specific training for activists on sexual harassment in the workplace and how to develop workplace policies

12. ASK FOR ANGELA - IT COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE

Carried as Amended: 12.1

Conference notes that 'Ask for Angela' is a scheme instigated in Lincolnshire County Council in 2016, which has been endorsed and rolled out in other cities in the UK. The initiative provided a mechanism where women, who feel unsafe, uncomfortable

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

or threatened on a date or a night out can approach the staff at the premises and use the code "Is Angela in?" to obtain assistance to help them get safely out of the situation, including ordering a taxi if necessary.

Conference calls upon National Women's Committee (NWC) to:

- Raise awareness of the "Ask for Angela" scheme with service groups, young members, other national committees, labour link forum, regional women's committees, other self organised groups, regionally and nationally.
- To work externally with the TUC, local authorities, Police and Crime Commissioners, directly elected Mayors, institutions of higher education and student unions
- To produce a briefing note, explaining the scheme, which can be shared as widely as possible within the union to raise awareness of the scheme
- To share PDFs of the campaign materials and invite a representative of "Ask for Angela" to address conference 2020 and have a stall and fringe event at a future conference
- Promote the facebook and twitter presence of "Ask for Angela"
- Encourage a consistent application of the scheme using the name Angela

13. Understanding Maternity Rights

Carried

Since the Equality Act (2010) introduced the specific protected characteristic of pregnancy and maternity, discrimination laws have improved working and maternity conditions for new mothers. However, the law is still quite complicated for new mothers and navigating their way through entitlements can often appear daunting and with many employers also not knowledgeable enough to administer these entitlements, better understanding on maternity rights is required.

Research has shown that many women are not aware of their rights including that they are entitled to a year off on maternity leave irrespective of their length of service, that they can share the leave with their partner under shared parental leave and that they are entitled to accrue annual leave while on maternity leave.

Similarly, many new mothers are not aware that workplace regulations require employers to provide suitable facilities for breastfeeding mothers to rest, and this includes being able to lie down.

Knowing what rights mothers have while on maternity leave is important to ensure employers are supporting and rewarding their employees in accordance with the law, but also for employers to retain and attract staff into their workforce.

Many new mothers feel disconnected, de-skilled and under-confident as they prepare to return to work. The return to work can be particularly daunting when you

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

include sleep deprivation and sorting out childcare arrangements. UNISON can play a key role in supporting members at this time and this would help ensure members are up to date on their rights and entitlements when pregnant, during maternity leave and when returning to work.

There is also a role for UNISON to support mothers in their return to work so that they feel fully confident to take up their jobs again.

Conference call on the National Women's Committee to

- 1 Work with Branches and Regions to ensure that Employers have clear Maternity Policies that are accessible to all,
- 2 Work with Branches and Regions to highlight the importance of the understanding of maternity rights which could include;
 - Up-to-date information and guidance that reps can use in the workplace to support members, and
 - Request that Maternity legislation is covered in Shop Stewards training and advice provided on what support can be given to new mothers.
3. Work with Regional Women's Groups to explore the possibility of piloting Maternity Champions in workplaces.

14. Universal Childcare

Carried

Childcare still remains a barrier to women in the workforce, with access to provision determined by class and income. Currently, all families are entitled to free childcare for 3-4 yr olds, but families with an income of over 16 hours on minimum wage are eligible for 30 hours of free childcare a week for the same age group, which causes difficulties for parents on zero-hours contracts. According to a study by Waldfogel and Stewart, the formula for the 30 hours free childcare diverts resources away from the state-run nurseries that lower-income families depend upon, widening the gap between children in affluent and deprived families and placing further strain on our education system. The average working week in the UK is 37 hours, so families working full-time who are eligible for the 30 hours provision must still pay for almost a full day's childcare a week. The increase in funding options has not been matched by investment in services, and many providers struggle to find places to meet demand. For families with younger children, there is much less support, and the average family with a 2-yr-old spends £11,562 on full-time nursery, which can price low-income families out of provision. Although some families receiving income-based support are eligible for 15 hours of free childcare, this accounts for less than half of the working week, and eligible children are often in competition with more affluent children for providers' limited number of places. Research by the Social Market Foundation has found that a high-quality nursery education provides children with the best start in life, and this current system favours the children of higher-income parents over those whose parents are unemployed or living in poverty.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

- Conference we ask the National Women's Committee to: Call on the government to introduce 37 hours of free childcare for all children under the age of four, which will facilitate parents' return to work and provide all our children with the best start in life, regardless of their background.
- Conference we ask the National Women's Committee to: Work with Labour Link to include universal childcare for under 4s as a priority in the next Labour Party manifesto.
- Conference we ask the National Women's Committee to: Call on the government to fund local authorities to provide new state-run nursery places for the children who will now be eligible, and offer opportunities for professional development to all childcare staff regardless of sector.
- Conference we ask the National Women's Committee to: Work with Labour Link to provide the infrastructure of premises and staff that will give each child access to high-quality care in the event of a Labour government.

15. Free Childcare for working women to enable TRUE development of equality within the workplace

Carried

For many women equality at work is often the key issues in their lives and whilst they make good headway in a chosen career or education path this can come sliding to a halt once they have children. As Conference is aware it remains the case that for women the main responsibility for the primary care of their children (unpaid) falls to them. Costs for childcare are variable across the country, with patchy provision of the main requirements of Breakfast clubs, After school clubs, Nursery and kindergarten facilities along with holiday care.

There is some financial help with the costs from Government, but these can also be various, often wrong – either under or over payments which are then clawed back causing significant financial hardship, and these are 'means' tested. Depending on circumstances amounts that could be claimed range from 10% >75% which if you are a lone parent on 75% child credit allowance the other 25% still has to be found, and if in a low paid job it can be a financial roadblock.

Other countries such as Sweden, Denmark, large parts of Germany have free childcare to enable working mothers to continue to build a career without detriment. Indeed in Sweden it is presumed that all women return and remain in the workforce after the birth of their children. In this country women are encouraged to return to work after the birth of children but provision is not automatic, they have to find and make their own childcare provision which is not always available and places with local providers may be full or unobtainable.

Conference, it is curious that during both world wars when women's labour was needed for the war effort they were welcomed and placed in all types of skilled, sometimes heavy or even dangerous jobs – such as munitions factories, chemical works, sawmills, learning to fly and transporting planes around the country for the RAF. Creches and nurseries and after school care were set up to enable the women

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

to work and there was no suggestion that they were too delicate or incapable of doing the work required. All the facilities for childcare were free at that time but as soon as the wars were over and the men came home to take up their old roles, the childcare facilities were immediately withdrawn and women expected to return to their previous status of unpaid mother and housewife, even those who had been made widows during the war.

Currently the government exhorts women to return to work after maternity leave but the difficulties' of coping with expensive and often difficult to find childcare, adversely affects most women's ability to continue to advance their careers which most men do not experience.

Conference – childcare provision should be the responsibility of the state as it is in several of our neighbouring European countries and has been provided free of charge by our own country when it suited.

Conference – it is time for free childcare for working or studying mothers again to enable women to have equality at work and in career growth and development.

Conference asks the National Women's Committee to:

- Develop a national campaign for free child care for all working and student mothers.
- Work with all appropriate Unison Committees, the TUC and relevant external organisations to achieve free child care.
- Work with Labour link with the aim of achieving free childcare as part of the next Labour Manifesto.

16. Women and debt

Carried

Conference notes that in terms of issues surrounding gender equality, debt is rarely cited as a contributing factor in women's overall financial status. However, the reality is that, in the UK, research proves that debt impacts women more than men.

Of the 8.8 million people struggling with debt in the UK, 64% are women (Money Advice Service).

In 2011, two thirds of declared insolvencies in the UK were women (Payplan).

According to the Insolvency Service 2017,

“The insolvency rate for females was higher than the male rate for the fourth successive year, and the gap has continued to widen. Insolvency rates were highest in the 35-44 age groups for males and 26-34 for females”

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

Low paid women are feeling the cost of living crisis sharply; nearly 1 in 2 say they feel worse off now than five years ago, leading to an increase in loans taken out by women (Fawcett).

Debt is a bigger problem for women for the following reasons:

A. Women earn less than men and according to the Fawcett Society, a women's equality charity, women in Britain earn 13.9% less than men. This is as a result of various factors which includes:

- outright discrimination (where women are paid less than men for exactly the same work)
- unequal caring responsibilities (women are more likely to care for children and elderly/sick relatives than men – leading to unequal earning potential).

B. Women are more likely to be in lower paid jobs or unemployed. Part-time work is often to be found in lower skilled or public sector professions (which pay less) – 80% of those working in the care or leisure sector are women.

The Fawcett Society also found of those earning less than the living wage – two thirds are women.

Women are also more likely to work in the public sector and recent austerity cuts have therefore impacted women's earnings further.

Female unemployment has risen to a 25-year high in recent years, while the number of unemployed men is falling.

Low or zero income makes women more susceptible to debt problems in order to meet the cost of household finances.

C. Childcare costs mean women are less likely to return to work after maternity leave.

- More than twice as many mothers than fathers have found that returning to work after having a child isn't financially worthwhile, according to the National Childbirth Trust (NCT).
- This is particularly true for single mothers; each year a mother is absent from the workplace, her future wages will fall by 4% (Fawcett Society).
- Childcare, low wages and unemployment inevitably leads to more women relying on borrowing to pay the bills.

D. Women struggle more and take longer to pay off debt. Both men and women struggle with debt problems across the UK. However, women take longer to pay off debts and have less income to fall back on in the event of debt crisis.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

On top of credit cards and overdrafts, debts such as student loans also hang around longer for women, depleting their income in the long run. Women graduates face 16 years of student debt while men would have paid them off within 11 years, according to the British Household Panel Survey.

A combination of motherhood and lower future earnings means that not only are women in more debt than men, they will carry debt for longer.

Conference therefore calls upon the National Women's Committee to:

1. Work with the NEC to carry out a survey to identify the financial challenges faced by women members.
2. Promote UNISON's There for You charity and the help it can offer to women members via SOGs, regions and branches.

17. Young Women and Student Loan Repayments

Carried

Going to University, gaining an education should be a positive experience for our young members. However, student loans are the burden that our young educated women members carry through a significant period of their working life. In fact the only way to escape complete repayment of any student loan is if a young woman never earns more than £25,000 per year. The only other circumstances when you can stop repaying your student loan back are if you die before you pay the loan off or if you become disabled and permanently unfit for work.

If you never earn more than £25,000 in a year, then your debt remains and is only written off after 25 or 30 years (depending on when you took out the loan).

Taking out a student loan means that there is a contract between the student and the Secretary of State for the Department for Education in England. The Student Loans Company (SLC), which is a non-profit government organisation, is acting as an agent on behalf of the Department of Education. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) collects student loan repayments from employers through the UK PAYE tax system.

By law, you must repay your loan in line with the loan contract and the regulations, even though government make changes to the contract and regulations from time to time, the burden of keeping up to date falls on the student for example:

- If you don't give SLC accurate and up-to-date information, you can be penalised and may have to pay a penalty charge or repay the loan and any interest and penalties in one lump sum.
- If you don't keep in touch with SLC, or fail to advise them of changes to any of your personal details, an interest rate of RPI plus 3% can be applied to your repayments, whatever your income.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

There are currently three different student loan repayment plans, with different terms and interest rates, depending on when you started studying, what you are or were studying and your annual income before tax.

For example on Plan two you will be paying back at 9% of your income before tax – which means if you are earning £29,500 a year before tax – you will be paying back £33.00 per month. If you are earning more than £33,000 a year before tax – you will be paying back £60 per month.

Students are charged interest on the loan from the day the first payment is made until it's been repaid in full or cancelled. The interest is calculated daily and applied to the amount you owe each month – this is known as 'compound interest'. Currently, this is set as Retail Price Index rate + 3%.

The problem for our young women is that they often, because they have pregnancies, breaks in their working lives to raise their children they incur greater interest on their student loans.

Being pregnant and mothering are life changing events which we always hope is a positive experience for women.

Many young women choose to have a family; to take maternity leave up to 52 weeks. But throughout, this time, the student loan continues to hang over the head of the young woman.

The consequences for a young woman becoming a mother and taking maternity leave is that while she may not be repaying her student loan because her income drops below £25,000 per year while on maternity leave, interest still accrues on the outstanding loan. So she ends up having to pay back for more years and at greater cost than a comparable young man who does not take a year off work.

So if a young woman leaves university at the same time as a comparable young man, they both commence employment in a similarly paid job, repaying their student loans at the same rate, they would complete their repayments at the same time. However, as soon as the young woman takes a maternity leave, she stops repayments because her earnings fall below the £25,000 threshold, she gets behind with her repayments, the duration of her loan grows and the outstanding debt continues to mount up due to the interest rates applied.

Conference we are concerned that this may be a government imposed provision, criteria or practice that indirectly discriminates against young women.

Conference, the only fair way to deal with this (apart from the complete repeal of student loans) is to freeze the student loan and interest accrual for the young woman going on maternity leave, until such time as she returns to work and is again earning more than £25,000 per year.

Conference calls upon the national women's committee to:

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

1. Work in collaboration with the Young Members to raise awareness of this potentially indirectly discriminatory situation for young women members
2. Reach out to our young women members to find real life examples of where this provision, criteria or practice has disadvantaged young women
3. Investigate the potential adverse impact on women who take maternity leave and the impact of the increased duration of the loan repayment schedule and the additional interest accrued on the loan – quantify the disadvantage.
4. Work with Labour Link to lobby the UK Government to address this matter in parliament.
5. Work with our Women's TUC Committee to raise awareness of the inequitable impact on young women throughout the trades union congress

18. Promoting Development of Women Activists

Carried

Promoting Development of Women Activists

UNISON has a proud record of delivering union based learning for both members and activists; we recognise that many women become involved as stewards, Health and Safety Reps, Learning Reps and Equality Reps by being involved in courses provided by UNISON.

We have long been proud of the fact that we have over a million women members but according to our Annual Reports, stewards and branch officers are still not proportional to the number of women members.

Conference welcomes the approach taken by the National Women's Committee and our conference Standing Orders Committee where members of the committee are term limited which means that Regional Women's Committees have to think properly about encouraging new activists to get involved.

Conferences also believes that there is a real place for women only learning events as part of a UNISON learning programme and training such as the STUC Women's Weekend schools are always very popular and evaluate well.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to work with the Learning and Organising Service to consider developing a Women's Leadership programme for women activists.

19. Making our women history

Carried

As we look back over a year of celebrating women's suffrage and some women gaining the right to vote, it has become all too apparent that our women, working class women are rarely recognised or documented in history. The celebrations we

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

have been part of has been brilliant for raising awareness of the difference women can make, but these weren't working class women and these weren't the first changes women made which has gone on to shape our society.

In 1888 working class women- and girls, took industrial action- these were the match workers and they named this action strike action- as we now know it- sadly this knowledge has been lost.

The 1888 match worker strike showed what true collective action can achieve- using various spheres of influence. It wasn't just the workers alone that were able to achieve their success- it was through the support of other working class women, women such as Annie Bessant- a woman often unheard of- a journalist, recognising the huge profits Bryant and May were making whilst paying their workers terrible wages and disgraceful working conditions- often resulting in illness and death. Annie encouraged the workers to get organised- Annie used the very same techniques we use today in organising.

She gained public support, she used the media and she used MP's but where is her story?

And 1906 saw the Belfast women's strike- again- working class women making a real difference- who knows there story?

What about Margaret Bondfield? she became the first female cabinet minister, and the first woman to be a privy counsellor in the UK, when she was appointed Minister of Labour in the Labour government of 1929–31. She had earlier become the first woman to chair the General Council of the Trades Union Congress (TUC). Why don't we know about these women?

Thank goodness therefore for the amazing, recently published book by Nan Sloane 'The women in the room, Labours forgotten history' a great start to the proper recording and documenting of women's achievements but this is only the start.

Our union has done amazing work, so much of it by female activists but where are our successes recorded?

We can no longer be our countries forgotten history, now is the time to recognise our achievements for the catalysts of change that we so often are. Women have always been influencers but women are not ones to boast, women have been instrumental in change. Mary McArthur championed for a national minimum wage almost a century before it was introduced- rarely remembered and often forgotten.

Conference we ask the women's committee to:

- Work with the NEC to identify a plan for recording the achievements of our working class women which can be adopted by regions and branches to ensure we are the future, the present and the history of our union, our communities and our country.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

- Encourage branches and regions to campaign locally for female blue plaques to recognise the achievements of local women and submit nominations to English heritage for the recognition and installation of blue plaques.

20. We Are Still Standing

Carried as Amended: 20.1

This conference fully recognises the huge impact 10 years of austerity have had on the lives of our women members and their families. However there have been many success stories across our service groups in UNISON where our women members have had victories. Some of these may be small or large victories but all demonstrate the power we have as a collective force in our workplaces. It would be empowering for us to see this published as a piece of work to highlight the benefits of being a woman member in UNISON. They may have tried to break us but 10 years on from austerity starting we are still standing.

Conference calls upon the Women's Committee to:

- 1 Write to every branch, region and SOG to ask what victories they would like to share from their branches, regions and SOGs. Then collate this information to be made available to share across our union.
- 2 Then collate this information detailing the success stories of our Unison women in order that they can be made available to share across our union. Either by way of a published hard copy document or electronic copy.

21. MAKING THE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER (LGBT) GROUP FULLY INCLUSIVE OF WOMEN'S IDENTITIES

Carried

Conference notes that the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) self organised group (SOG) has always sought to be fully representative of its diverse membership, in line with UNISON's rules. It notes that the LGBT group works with inclusive, umbrella definitions of bisexual and transgender. It's bi network is for all members who feel attraction to more than one gender, and it's trans network is for all types of self-identifying trans people; for people with trans backgrounds and members whose gender identity does not fit into the gender binary i.e. non-binary members.

However, despite these inclusive definitions some members, including women members, who the LGBT group considers to be part of the group are put off. The LGBT group hears repeatedly that when women members attend its meetings, they feel welcomed and included, but before they attend they had been unsure. This is particularly the case for members who do not personally use the label LGBT about themselves, for example women who identify as queer or pansexual. It is clear that there must be many other women who are put off and never get over that barrier.

Conference notes that the national LGBT committee has undertaken consultation during 2018 on making the LGBT SOG fully inclusive. This followed a motion from the national young members' forum to 2017 LGBT conference highlighting the

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

growth in the number of people, and young people in particular, identifying their sexual orientation and gender identity in many different ways beyond a binary definition, and expressing their preference to see the LGBT group move to organise on an LGBT+ (plus) basis.

The overwhelming majority of the consultation responses, and all the regional group responses, were in favour of the proposal to change the group's name to LGBT+, and the national LGBT committee therefore submitted a motion to 2018 national LGBT conference proposing changing the name.

The consultation also sought views on what the LGBT group should be doing to make the group fully inclusive. The responses will be considered as part of the national LGBT committee's on-going work to improve its policies and practices.

Putting the + in the group's name would not change its existing remit of being a self-organised group for all members who experience prejudice because of their gender identity or sexual orientation, but would demonstrate an inclusiveness beyond that conveyed by our current name so that women who we consider to be members are not put off from participating.

Conference therefore calls on the national women's committee to :

- 1 Work with the National LGBT committee to circulate information to branch and regional women's groups on what the name change would mean;
- 2 Encourage regional and branch women's groups to campaign for support for any rule change proposal from LGBT Conference to National Delegate Conference regarding changing the name of the group to LGBT+.

22. Support for women's self organisation; lost voices

Carried

Conference believes that the strength and sustainability of all unions depend on the development of their activists. With 1 million women members, we also know that achieving equal rights for women is a long battle and whilst there have been gains over the last 25 years, women's rights have never been more under attack than they are today.

UNISON is committed to working to fight the vicious and unnecessary cuts being imposed by government. Women have not faced a greater threat to their financial security and rights in living memory. Decades of steady, albeit slow, progress on equality is being dismantled, as cuts to women's jobs and the benefits and services they rely on, turn back time on women's equality. Now, more than ever, women's self organisation, women members and activists need the support of their union as many women feel that their voices are not being heard and that they are not properly consulted on all matter related to women's equality. Women feel that they are being silenced.

Women are the majority of the members in UNISON but remain the minority in terms of their visibility in union roles and throughout UNISON structures, compared with

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

their proportion in membership. Conference recognises the work over the years to address this imbalance but believes that more needs to be done. As we celebrated 25 years of UNISON last year, the evidence that women's equality at best is being rolled back and at worst is under attack, should be a signal to us to re-evaluate the resources supporting women's self organisation. Indeed the TUC recognised a thinning out of specialised equality roles across the trade union movement as a whole.

In the first year whereby the role of UNISON branch women's officer has become a Rule Book position, Conference believes that it would be timely to review the resources that are afforded to supporting women's self organisation via our regional women's committees, branch women's officers as well as resources that ensure that UNISON can continue to campaign and meet the challenges facing our women members and women workers across the UK. Conference believes that 1 million women deserve to not have their rights rolled back and to have the necessary support to effectively meet these challenges.

Conference therefore calls upon the National Women's Committee to work with the relevant committees and departments to;

- 1 Initiate a comprehensive review of the union's support and resources at branch, regional and national level for women's self organisation to ensure that UNISON is best placed to meet the challenges facing our women members.
- 2 Review the mechanisms for consulting with women members on issues that directly impact on women's equality rights.
- 3 The national women's committee should report the findings of the review to UNISON National Women's Conference 2020.

23. Protecting, extending and enforcing disabled women's rights

Carried

Conference notes that the last Labour government introduced the Equality Act 2010 in order to protect specific groups, including disabled women, from direct and indirect discrimination and from harassment and victimisation. The Act also gives disabled women the right to reasonable adjustments and protects them from discrimination arising from their disability, protections which apply to disabled people only.

However conference is aware that the Act has been under attack from the Conservative government since 2010. The provisions on dual discrimination, which would apply where discrimination related to both gender and disability, were never enacted. Provisions such as third party harassment, the power of tribunals to make wider recommendations, and statutory equality questionnaires were repealed by the Conservatives as part of their so called "red tape challenge".

Added to this, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), which was designed by the last Labour government to enforce the rights enshrined in the Equality Act, has been hit by swingeing Tory budget cuts. The National Audit Office

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

reported that the EHRC's budget has been cut by nearly 70% since its first full year in operation and that staff numbers have reduced by 56% since 2010. As a result, unsurprisingly, the EHRC has been unable to adequately perform the enforcement role envisaged for them.

This has meant that the Equality Act is not being properly enforced and disabled women's rights are being ignored and undermined on a daily basis in workplaces. The gender pay gap remains in place, with women routinely paid less than men and the EHRC lacks the powers it needs to properly enforce the gender pay gap regulations. Pregnancy and maternity discrimination often goes unchallenged as new mothers don't have time to take a case in their first three months with a newborn. Far too many employers drag their feet on implementing reasonable adjustments, sometimes for years. Without union representation, many disabled women workers are forced to resign because they cannot get the adjustments they are entitled to by law.

Conference notes with concern that exiting the European Union could allow the Conservatives further leeway to chip away at the Equality Act and remove our hard won protections. Without the same recourse to European courts, disabled women will be at the mercy of the UK government and may have to rely on UK courts alone to interpret and enforce their rights.

Conference therefore calls on the National Women's Committee, working with the National Disabled Members Committee, to:

- 1 Campaign for better enforcement of the Equality Act, combined with increased funding and more robust powers for the EHRC;
- 2 Fight any attempts to undermine the Equality Act in the light of the UK exiting the European Union;
- 3 Circulate UNISON's resources for representing disabled workers, including the 'Proving Disability and reasonable adjustments' guide and our Disability Leave bargaining guide and model policy;
- 4 Campaign for statutory timescales for the implementation of reasonable adjustments and a statutory right to disability leave for disabled workers.

24. Sex Discrimination Law

Carried

When it comes to sex discrimination law, the UK's national story has undoubtedly been one of considerable progress over many years, but it is also true that in some areas that progress has been too slow or has stalled altogether.

Our discrimination laws have been instrumental in changing attitudes and in improving life for many women, at work and in society generally. Yet, in some areas those very laws have been shown to be inadequate, or to be beset by undue complexity and unacceptable delays for those women who have sought to use those laws in our courts and tribunals.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

This conference applauds the courageous work of the UNISON legal department in challenging through the courts the government imposition of fees for employment tribunals, which adversely and directly affected women's access to justice.

This conference further applauds the work of Fawcett Society in undertaking a comprehensive review of existing sex discrimination laws, published in January 2018. Fawcett Society brought together a panel of women, experts in their fields to conduct this legal review, making recommendations in a broad range of areas to eliminate the disadvantage that women so often face within their work and in broader society.

The report makes recommendations on improving the law and practice thereby protecting and enhancing women lives in the following areas:

- Brexit
- In the workplace
- Pay and pensions
- Maternity paternity and family friendly rights
- Sexual harassment
- Dress codes
- Violence against Women and Girls
- Services for women and girls
- Domestic violence and the law
- Sexual violence and the law
- Hate crime and misogyny
- Access to justice
- Multiple discrimination
- Sex equality law in Northern Ireland

What is clear from the review is that despite the progress that has been made since the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act was introduced, and followed by the implementation of the Equality Act 2010, the discrimination, harassment, victimisation, misogyny and violence that women experience on a daily basis shows no sign of abating, and the gender pay gap stubbornly remains.

Conference calls upon the national women's committee to:

1. Publicise the report widely among our membership
2. Incorporate the relevant workplace recommendations from the report into the ongoing campaigning and the forthcoming annual work plan of the national women's committee
3. Write to Fawcett Society to congratulate them on this piece of work

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

25. Period necessity, not a Luxury

Carried as Amended: 25.1

Conference notes that a motion on 'period poverty' was passed at the 2018 national women's conference.

Conference is pleased that since then, Scotland and Wales have committed themselves to providing free sanitary products to schools. This is a very positive move and example.

However, conference feels this does not go far enough, we believe that sanitary products should be available to all. Free universal access to them is needed. These could be provided by collection from a pharmacy, the same way that children's medication is given freely.

According to a latest research by Plan International UK, one in ten girls has sometimes been unable to afford sanitary products. One in seven has had to borrow tampons or sanitary towels from a friend because they couldn't afford to buy their own.

Conference believes that period poverty is prevalent as some women are now turning to food banks for sanitary products. Homeless women, asylum seekers and refugees are particularly at risk.

Poverty is just one of the numerous issues that might affect a woman's access to sanitary products. Very often, women suffer very many negative effect of being born female through no choice of their own. This can be as a result of:

- Finding the extra 'housekeeping' money to buy sanitary products;
- Embarrassment over raising the subject in company of others when there is a need to bring up an issue;
- The means, experience or maturity to handle the trauma of coping with heavy periods and 'accidents' at home, school, work, during any physical activity and socially
- Restriction of social activities as a means of coping;
- No female friend or relative to confide in or seek support and guidance;
- Extra cost of washing clothes and bedding and sometimes replacement when permanently stained.

Period poverty is not simply another aspect of poverty: it is a reflection of a society ridden with gendered inequalities. This is an issue that is slowly destructive. It disenfranchises and disempowers, affecting access to education and to opportunity.

For generations, women have been living without access to sanitary products because they can't afford them, but period poverty isn't going away on its own.

Access to period care is a basic human right, and considering that it affect half of the world's population, it's about time all women had access to free sanitary products.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

Women already face so many challenges in achieving true equality in society, so it seems completely unfair that something as normal and natural as periods should hold women back further.

Cymru Wales Regional Women's Committee believes that Conference should look to Wales for best practice. In March 2018 Welsh Government announced local authorities would receive £440,000 over the next two years to tackle period poverty in their communities where levels of deprivation are highest and £700,000 of capital funding to improve facilities and equipment in schools - ensuring that all girls and young women can access good sanitary facilities when they need them.

Welsh Government funding has been passed to local councils on the basis that they are best placed to know where to target effective action for tackling period poverty in their communities, which could be through community groups, schools or food banks.

Conference applauds the work undertaken by charity organisations such as Wings Cymru and the Red Box Project to provide free sanitary protection products in schools. However, whilst the work undertaken by these charitable organisations is applaudable, it is unacceptable that charitable support is required to bridge a gap in funding for sanitary protection products where they are most needed.

Despite Welsh Government commitment to funding, there remains a disparity across local authorities in terms of access to free sanitary products in schools and areas of high deprivation.

Conference therefore calls on the national women's committee (NWC) to:

1. Continue to campaign to end period poverty;
2. Work with the National Young Members Forum to publicise the work of organisations campaigning to end period poverty;
3. Work with branches to raise awareness of this issue in workplaces and to seek ways to help.
4. Where sanitary protection is not provided by council funding, call upon Local Government Branches to work with local organisations such as Wings Cymru/Red Box Project to promote provision of FREE sanitary protection products in all schools.
5. Encourage Unison branches to set up sanitary protection donation/collection points.
6. To report back to National Women's Committee on the progress of action.

26. Period Pain

Carried

Periods are a fact of life for women everywhere, yet they are still by many regarded as a stigma which cannot be discussed, and which women should just endure quietly

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

without inconveniencing anyone. While some women suffer only mild symptoms many suffer severe debilitating pain and cramps every month.

Ahead of International Day of the Girl on 11 October 2017, Plan International UK conducted a study with girls aged 14 to 21 years old and found that 48% felt embarrassed about their period. This shame prevents open discussion: only one in five girls felt comfortable talking to a teacher about their period and less than a third felt okay talking to their dad about it. Not only does this stigma have consequences on young girls growing up but it continues into later working life.

Many employers these days have sickness policies which are designed to discourage people taking sickness absence resulting in a climate of presentism. In some workplaces people are reviewed if they are off for more than one short period of time and could end up at a hearing if this continues.

YouGov Omnibus research conducted on behalf of BBC Radio 5 in 2016 show that 57% of employed women who suffer from period pain say that it affected their ability to work. However only 27% of these women ever admitted to their employer that this was the case. 31% gave their employer a different reason to explain their troubles while yet an even larger proportion of 33% did not let on that they were feeling unwell at all. 35% of the women who said that period pain affected their ability to work find that period pain affects their ability by making it harder to concentrate. 19% had to take a short break because of the pain, 35% had to go home early and 17% had to take a day off because of the pain. Society has been slow to recognise that period pain can be a significant issue working women everywhere. Some countries including Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Indonesia have laws in place which allow women time off work when they are menstruating. Similar policies have also been proposed by lawmakers in Italy and Russia.

Tahira Patala an employment law consultant at ELAS said: "It is a long standing principle that the effects of any impairment are key when it comes to establishing disability, and employers need to consider this when assessing any absence caused by period pain. Period pains are not specifically covered as a disability under the Equality Act however in severe cases they could be considered a disability. This would be assessed on an individual basis and is about extreme cases of pain. As such, I cannot see that there would be an influx of claims. When considering the facts, an employer should look at other conditions which are associated with period pains such as migraines, PMS or endometriosis."

- Conference we ask National Women's Committee to work with Labour Link to work together towards either recognising severe period pain under the Equality Act or to encourage the government / employers to introduce some sort of menstrual leave policy similar to those in other countries mentioned.
- Conference we also request National Women's Committee to work with Labour Link to work together towards introducing some sort of awareness campaign introduced like those of other disabilities i.e. mental health to help quash the stigma surrounding periods.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

27. Time to talk about menstrual health

Carried

Issues surrounding menstrual health and the impact on the working lives of women are largely hidden from society.

Research conducted by YouGov finds that 91% of women have experienced period pain at some point in their working life. 57% of women in employment suffering from period pain say that it has affected their ability to work: affecting their concentration, physical ability to do the job, or even resulting in going home early.

Yet the stigma surrounding menstrual health means that women are unlikely to tell their employer about it. Only a quarter (27%) of women experiencing period pain at work said that they told their employer about it.

Young women often lack the confidence to raise it as an issue. Feminax found that over 80% of young British women suffer from period pains, and 10% of young women regularly being bedridden by severe pain.

While period poverty remains a serious issue, no union has led the way in challenging employment practices to ensure that women are supported when dealing with period pain. It is also vital that young women are given the confidence and empowered to raise the issue of their menstrual health with employers. By leading on this area, UNISON would position itself as a union that is relevant to the lives of young women.

Countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, and Indonesia, have progressive laws that enable women to take time off for period pain.

We need to be radical and push for progress. From raising awareness of the impact of period pain on young women at work, to campaigning and bargaining for policies that support young women – we must lead the way.

This Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to:

- Work with the National Young Member's Forum to develop an awareness campaign, aimed at young women in UNISON
- Work with appropriate bodies within UNISON to conduct research of young women in UNISON and the impact of period pain on their work, in order to develop toolkits for branches that are reflective of the different sectors we represent
- Work with Labour Link to raise with the Labour Party the issues surrounding menstrual health and work.
- Liaise with Bargaining Support in order to develop bargaining advice on this issue.

28. SECURING REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Carried

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

Conference notes with serious concern that following the result of the referendum in Ireland to repeal the 8th Amendment of the Irish Constitution, Northern Ireland will become the only jurisdiction in these islands to persist with restrictive abortion laws that breach human rights. Conference believes that the time has come for Parliament to take clear action to address the situation.

Theresa May has taken the position that Westminster legislating in this area would breach the devolution settlement, something her Government seems to have no difficulty with in relation to the claw-back of powers within the EU Withdrawal Act. Whilst both health and justice are devolved matters, this position disregards the obligation placed on the Westminster Parliament under the Good Friday Agreement to: "legislate as necessary to ensure the United Kingdom's international obligations are met in respect of Northern Ireland" (Paragraph 33(b), Strand 1).

Northern Ireland abortion law is incompatible with international human rights obligations which the UK has signed and ratified. Most recently the UN Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women has found in February 2018 that the current law on abortion in Northern Ireland "violates the rights of women in Northern Ireland by unduly restricting their access to abortion".

The legal basis for the effective ban on abortion is a Westminster law, Sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act 1861. This law is 150 years old and covers the outdated offences of 'child-stealing' and the use of gunpowder to blow up a building. The UN has called the law and the refusal of Westminster to act, a "grave and systematic violation" of human rights". The UK Supreme Court has been clear that the current law treats women as "vehicles", is "untenable" and needs "radical reconsideration". The UN Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women has called for the repeal of legislation criminalising abortion under the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 and urged that the UK legislate to provide for expanded grounds to legalise abortion in a range of areas.

The UK Supreme Court has recently found that the current law in Northern Ireland is disproportionate and incompatible with Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) in so far as it prohibits abortion on the grounds of rape, incest or fatal foetal abnormality. The Court however did not issue a formal declaration of incompatibility due to the manner in which the case was taken. Conference believes that the views of the court in relation to the current restrictive laws compatibility with human rights are clear. Conference considers it inevitable that the law will be deemed incompatible with the ECHR in due course.

Conference therefore calls on the National Women's Committee to work with the NEC and the Northern Ireland Women's Committee to demand that the UK Government:

- Repeal Sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act 1861, and;
- Introduce legislation through Parliament to ensure that the law in Northern Ireland is compatible with international human rights obligations, in order to

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

guarantee that women in Northern Ireland do not continue to suffer a serious deficit in rights protections.

29. Menopause and the workplace

Carried as Amended: 29.1

Around 3.5 million women aged 50 years and over are currently in employment in the UK. The employment rate for women in the UK has actually increased in the past few decades and women now represent nearly half of the UK labour force. This means that many more women are affected by symptoms of the menopause in the course of their daily activities, often to the detriment of their families, work and life in general. Menopause symptoms vary, with around 25% of women suffering severe symptoms. It is no surprise that women going through the menopause find work difficult due to poor concentration, tiredness, poor memory, depression, feeling low, reduced confidence and particularly hot flushes which are all contributory factors. These symptoms can have significant impact on attendance at work, which can then be misconstrued as a performance issue.

Employers have responsibility for the health and safety of all their employees, and there are clear business reasons for proactively managing an age diverse workforce.

UNISON has produced guidance for its safety reps on menopause and work. According to the research from TUC, workplaces are not designed for menopausal women in mind. Often managers are male or younger; and women find it difficult to disclose their menopausal issues to them. Many women opt to work part time or leave work altogether because flexible working hours are not available. Women would find it useful to have information regarding the menopause or advice regarding how to cope with work and their employer.

Temperature control in the workplace remains an important issue. The hottest issue is that managers don't recognise problems associated with the menopause, believing it to be a difficult subject. Managers need training on menopause related sick leave and flexible working time arrangements; they need to provide appropriate uniforms.

Conference congratulates South Lanarkshire Council UNISON branch for developing a Menopause Policy with their employers which is the first comprehensive policy of its kind in Scotland. It is vital that employers provide the support that women need within the workplace.

We must use all our resources to challenge attitudes to the menopause, to ensure employers have procedures in place and to ensure that the workplace meets the needs of the menopausal woman.

We therefore call upon the National Women's Committee to:

1. Work with branches and regions to establish examples of good practice in the local areas and build on this to provide workshops to enable union reps to represent and negotiate suitable working conditions for women going through the menopause.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

2. Work with Learning and Organising Services (LAOS) to produce training materials on menopause to branches and regions

30. Miscarriage is not an illness

Carried

For every woman pregnancy is the start of a new chapter full of emotional ups and downs. Making plans for the future as a family, the excitement and anticipation of waiting for the pitter patter of tiny feet. Whether this is their first pregnancy or not, all women will be anxious until their baby is born and this is multiplied for women who have difficulty conceiving or have previously miscarried.

NHS UK estimates that 1 in 8 women who know they are pregnant will miscarry. Many more miscarriages will occur before a woman is aware she is even pregnant and losing three or more pregnancies in a row (recurrent miscarriages) is uncommon and affects 1 in 100 women. The estimated UK miscarriage rate is 250,000 each year and about 15% to 20% of all women with a verified pregnancy will end up having a miscarriage. Eighty percent of these miscarriages will occur in the first trimester, the risk of pregnancy loss after 12 weeks is estimated to be 3% to 4%. After 20 weeks, when a loss would be termed a stillbirth rather than a miscarriage, the risk is around 1 in 160.

A miscarriage can have a profound emotional impact, not only on the woman herself, but also on her partner, friends and family. This impact can be felt immediately after the miscarriage but in some cases it can take several weeks, and women affected by miscarriage may go through a bereavement period and it is very common to feel tearful, sad, lonely and empty. You may also feel a sense of guilt, shock and anger – sometimes at a partner, or at friends or family members who have had successful pregnancies. Miscarriage can also cause feelings of anxiety or depression, and can lead to relationship problems.

For working women there is the further problem of how their employer handles this. Under current legislation a working woman who suffers a miscarriage less than 24 weeks will be dealt with under the company's normal sickness process. They not only have the emotional impact of what has happened but also the worry that they will be progressed through the sickness process or, worse case scenario, dismissed.

Conference calls upon women's committee to:

- 1 Work with labour link to lobby both the labour party and government to remove or reduce the 24 week period.
- 2 Work with labour link and the national executive committee to look at a national campaign.
- 3 Work with the national executive committee and the Unison's health service group executive committee to create a National Unison Policy looking at best practice.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

31. Supporting women after stillbirth

Carried

Conference is aware that a stillborn baby is one who has died before or during birth and at or after 24 weeks of pregnancy. Unfortunately; this is not a rare tragedy as around 15 babies die before, during or soon after birth every day in the UK. Sadly, this equates to 1 in 225 babies each year, yet there is little spoken of this tragedy and of the mothers' maternity rights in these circumstances.

Conference notes that after stillbirth, employees who have given the correct notice are entitled to 52 weeks' Maternity Leave. They may also be entitled to Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) or Maternity Allowance (MA) depending on their level of earnings. However this information is not widely available and both employers and employees may not be aware of these rights.

It is also estimated that 4.2 million women in the UK are living with depression associated with stillbirth and that this will have an impact on their mental health within the workplace. Further, Conference is aware that with the decline in Mental Health Services, women are often unable to access the right services at the right time.

Conference is aware that it can be difficult for a woman to think about practicalities and finances after their baby has died, however knowing about their entitlement in these circumstances would allow more quiet time to grieve before returning to work.

Conference welcomes the UNISON guidance 'Pregnancy, Your Rights at Work', however we note that there is no mention of the rights of a mother who has had a stillbirth. We would also welcome further guidance and support for UNISON Branch Women Officers and Welfare Officers so they understand the issues and know where to signpost mothers for help and support.

Therefore; Conference calls upon the National Women's Committee to:

- Review and update the UNISON guidance 'Pregnancy Your Rights at Work' to ensure women members know what they are entitled to if they have a stillbirth and to signpost them to the relevant and appropriate stillbirth Charities.
- Provide information and guidance to Women and Welfare Officers to enable appropriate support for women members in the workplace who have experienced a stillbirth.
- Encourage regions and branches to negotiate improvements in workplace maternity policies, which include the rights of women who have a stillbirth and to signpost employers to guidance produced by relevant and appropriate Stillbirth Charities and to;
- Lobby politicians to improve bereavement care and mental health services for women who have experienced Stillbirth.
- Report back to Conference 2020

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

32. Abortion Rights

Carried

Conference applauds the historic landslide vote by the people of Southern Ireland to repeal the 8th amendment to the Irish constitution and recognises the huge victory for a women's right to choose both in the South but also as a beacon of hope for all women wherever they live who are still fighting for access to free safe abortions.

Conference notes:

1. In Britain the 1967 Abortion Act gave women access to abortion but only under specific grounds and if signed off by two doctors, and that the Offences against the Person Act 1861 which made abortion a criminal offense is still on the statute book. The 1967 Abortion Act was never extended to Northern Ireland.
2. Today medical advancements mean that women can safely access abortion by taking two pills. This regimen is now on the World Health Organisation Essential medicines list for safe abortion. Abortion care therefore no longer needs to be carried out in a clinical setting and this is reflected in home becoming the place the second abortion pill can be taken under the Abortion Act in Scotland, Wales and England.
3. However whilst the way women can access abortion has changed, the criminal law remains. Within the current criminal law a woman in Britain could face 12 years in prison for using abortion pills she has purchased online. A doctor could face 12 years in prison for providing safe abortion care without a second doctor's approval. A nurse could face 12 years in prison for providing medical abortion on their best clinical judgement without the legal grounds first being signed off by two doctors. In Northern Ireland the penalty is life imprisonment for the woman undergoing an illegal abortion and for anyone assisting her. These criminal sanctions are completely unnecessary for highly regulated UK healthcare such as abortion. Trapped within the legal framework of criminal law, abortion care is being regarded unlike any other medical procedure available in the UK today. By situating abortion in criminal law with the need for two doctors to sign off legal grounds, rather than being situated wholly within medical regulation, we are saying to abortion care professionals - particularly to nursing staff - that we don't trust their individual clinical judgement or competence. No other healthcare professionals are made to work within these limits.
4. Medical organisations in favour of decriminalisation include: Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, Royal College of Midwives, Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare, British Medical Association and the Royal College of Nursing.
5. Parliamentary groups are also in favour of decriminalisation of abortion. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Population and Development has called for the complete decriminalisation throughout the UK

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

- 6 In 2017 a majority in the House of Commons were in favour of decriminalising abortion in England and Wales with MP's across all political parties voting to pass Diana Johnson MP's Reproductive Health Access to Termination bill through its first reading.

Conference believes:

- a) There is a solution to all the issues highlighted above, which is to decriminalise abortion. Healthcare regulation will always and should always stand. But the only thing being achieved by the current law is to restrict and stigmatise both women who request an abortion and the healthcare professionals who provide that care in good faith.
- b) Decriminalisation would mean that abortion services are regulated in the same way as other medical practices. We need to allow doctors and nurses to deliver best practice without fear of being criminalised. For women decriminalisation would mean empowering them to make their own informed healthcare choices and access to them. Women would no longer have their bodies ruled over by a law enacted when Queen Victoria was on the throne.
- c) There is already a wide consensus on this issue. Now we all need to come together to decriminalise abortion for women in the UK.

Conference calls for:

- i) National Women's Committee to use their structures within our union to ensure members are kept up to date with the campaign for decriminalisation.
- ii) National Women's Committee to publicise Abortion Rights Campaign and encourage branches to affiliate, in line with national policy.

Encouraging members to write to their MP's in support of decriminalisation of abortion.

33. Abortion Clinic Buffer Zones

Carried

This conference notes

- 1. UNISON's position in recognising a women's right to choose.
- 2. The decision to terminate a pregnancy is a difficult one for a woman.
- 3. That women often face protests outside clinics and hospitals when seeking an abortion.

Furthermore this conference notes that:

Despite the Abortion Clinic Review undertaken by the Home Office identifying at least 36 anti-abortion demos in 2017 the home secretary Sajjad Javid decided that abortion clinic buffer zones were unnecessary.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

This conference welcomes the decision of Ealing Borough Council to introduce a 100 metre buffer zone against protestors outside a Marie Stopes Clinic in its area.

This conference asks the National Women's Committee to work with the NEC and Labour Link to continue to campaign for abortion clinic buffer zones.

34. Domestic Violence – Time for UNISON to Take Action

Carried as Amended: 34.1

Every week more than two women are killed by current or ex-partners and figures are sadly rising. Currently one in four women in the UK will experience domestic violence at some point in their lives. All research indicates that in an economic recession, domestic violence and abuse increases yet meanwhile the Government imposed austerity cuts are adversely affecting women's support services and refuges.

The vast majority of the victims and survivors of domestic abuse are women and children, and women are also considerably more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of violence, and sexual abuse.

The impact of domestic abuse is wide-ranging and will inevitably affect workers and their colleagues. It is important that it is not ignored in the workplace but understood as a serious, recognisable and preventable issue. Abuse can be psychological, financial and emotional, and includes controlling or coercive behaviour.

With more than one million women UNISON members, it's highly likely that daily we are working alongside colleagues that are suffering from Domestic Abuse.

As a Trade Union we must raise our voices to these women to empower them to get the help and support they need when they find themselves in this dire situation.

There are many charities that support this cause and it is not our wish to reproduce their great work.

We ask the National Women's Group to work with the NEC to:

1. Consider an annual UNISON 'Purple Ribbon' campaign to raise awareness of this issue and empower our membership to support victims of domestic violence;
2. Consider supporting the White Ribbon Campaign, which is working towards ending male violence to women. Their pledge never to commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women.
3. Develop and distribute a model Domestic Violence policy that Branches can seek to implement within their organisation;
4. Seek to provide Branches and Workplace Stewards the information needed so they are better equipped to signpost and assist members in need of assistance.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

35. Football and the rise of domestic violence

Carried

Football is part of our national culture, none more so than when the World Cup is played and our four great nations are entered in to the play offs. Yet each year our police forces prepare around the rise of domestic abuse and violence as the statistics have shown.

Football in its self is only one of the factors along with access to alcohol amongst others and of course an abusive person, but evidence is clear, when a football team loses, domestic violence increases. Previous figures have shown that domestic violence occurrences rose by around 38% on the days when England lost, and 26% when the team won or drew a match. As a Union with over 80% women and domestic abuse strategies at the core of our policies and with many of us avid supporters of our local teams and our national ones, we as women will have someone within our family structures who attend football matches or attend local venues where they are being shown.

Here in the Northern region we have approached Show Racism the Red Card to work with our network and the region on engaging with local clubs at all levels both male and female as well as children's clubs to raise awareness of domestic abuse. While football is part and parcel of our communities along with other sports, for some reason football incites levels of abuse and violence not seen with any other sport. The network has previously agreed to working with the White Ribbon campaign on why we need to include and get men to stand up and call out on domestic abuse as no one should be a victim to abuse and violence in any field of their lives.

Since 2014 the Football United Against Domestic Violence campaign has worked with FA, Premier League and BT Sport to stand together against domestic abuse and call out the sexist attitudes and behaviour some fans exhibit. Many forces have joined "Give Domestic Abuse The Red Card Campaign" with Women's aid working with clubs and broadcasters.

Some studies have found the increase in violent offending relates to the outcome of the game for example, winning has been attributed to an increase in assertiveness, patriotism and alcohol consumption. Alcohol is a feature of both Spectatorship and sponsorship and identified as a contributory factor in domestic abuse. Links to research reports an increase in domestic abuse at the time football matches occurs and shows a reflected increase on weekend matches.

Research from Glasgow Caledonian university and Bristol University, highlighted that other studies had "over simplified" the issue of domestic violence discounting such a large number of men who watch the sport and increase in policing on match days

They believe more emphasis should be done to promote the whole anti-violence message through sport and football clubs by them highlighting the issue of domestic abuse and violence.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

Conference more needs to be done as the last research came from 2014 and Scotland have done work relating to this issue, but all of our devolved nations as a collective one pronged approach surely would be more productive.

This is not only a women's issue but a UNISON one too. It is about being involved in raising awareness and being champions of domestic abuse that occurs within sports and football on and off the pitch.

We acknowledge football doesn't cause domestic abuse and that women are not only the victims of domestic abuse but they are the majority, and the behaviours and actions of the abuser who exert their power and control over victims is often underestimated in the football and sporting world.

So let's get behind this and kick all forms of violence out of football and all sports.

We as the national women's committee to:

- Work through their affiliation to Women's aid and Show Racism Red card to raise a UNISON campaign jointly
- Work with LAOS to look at producing a training programme that inter-links all levels of violence together
- Work with NEC, Labour Link and branches to enquire on the benefits about sponsorship's into sports and the influence the sponsorship can take in relation to combating and raising the awareness of violence against women.
- Work with the NEC to look at the possibility of commissioning up to date research into the links between sports and domestic violence.

36. Misogyny and domestic abuse experienced by disabled women

Carried

Conference notes that, as the #MeToo movement demonstrates, misogyny is widespread in our society. However for disabled women there are particular challenges. Disabled women are more likely to be subjected to sexual assault, harassment and domestic abuse than non-disabled women. When they seek help they are often failed by inaccessible services that are not tailored to their needs. Women with learning disabilities may find it difficult to articulate their experiences, or be disbelieved when they try.

Sexism and misogyny are undoubtedly learned behaviour, the same way racism is or for that matter any form of oppressive and discriminatory behaviour is.

Statements like 'boys will be boys' leach into society and trivialise issues while giving men - consciously or subconsciously - an excuse to be ignorant and reinforce a value system that holds women accountable for the actions of men.

A man wolf-whistled you in the street? You were sexually harassed in the workplace? Well maybe if YOU covered up this wouldn't have happened. This

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

misogynistic mind-set highlights all that is wrong with attitudes towards women, and is all too often left unchallenged.

Frustratingly these age-old ideals are further perpetuated by both our national and social media. The concept that 'sex sells' repeatedly encourages the objectification of women, however although media manages to encourage these perceptions, it is actually only a fraction of the whole oppressive nature of misogyny and sexism.

In an official analysis of sexual assault statistics conducted by the Crime Survey of England and Wales this year, "one in five women in England and Wales had experienced some type of sexual assault, since the age of 16." However this doesn't take into consideration the additional level of sexual abuse, violence and oppression Black, LGBT and disabled women face on top of this. A report commissioned by Women's Aid – Making the Links: Disabled Women and Domestic Violence stated that "disabled women are twice as likely to experience gender-based violence as non-disabled women."

Conference notes that according to the Office for National Statistics more than 80% of victims don't report the ordeal to the police. There are many reasons why women do not report. When it comes to the reasons for not coming forward there are many factors at play not least of which is that upwards of 70% of rapes are committed by acquaintances, friends or family members, which can play a part in deciding whether to report someone within close quarters of you – especially if they can easily access your details or home address.

Where this becomes even more difficult is where that person is your carer. A carer may control your money and provide the assistance for you to leave your home. Where your abuser is your carer they are the person who you are sometimes physically dependent on for being able to just meet your everyday personal needs. The study for Women's Aid revealed that "At times, abusers deliberately emphasised and reinforced the woman's dependence as a way of asserting and maintaining control. The vulnerability felt by disabled women was greater when subjected to physical abuse"

The control can become a toxic, misogynistic abuse of power which preys on the perceived vulnerability of some disabled women and needs to be stopped.

Conference strongly believes that misogyny, sexism and domestic abuse are everybody's problem and women shouldn't have to work alone for change against a system set up and upheld by men. Empathy and understanding are the foundations of solidarity.

Conference asks the National Women's Committee to work with the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. Raise awareness of the particular issues that disabled women face when subjected to misogynist behaviour;
2. Continue to publicise UNISON's Harassment at Work guide

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

3. Lobby and campaign with all relevant internal and external bodies, including Labour Link, to seek accessible support services for disabled women to leave abusive situations.

37. No to Islamophobia, Defend A Woman's Right To Choose What She Wears Carried

Conference utterly condemns the former foreign secretary Boris Johnson who used his weekly newspaper column in The Sunday Telegraph to launch a vicious diatribe against Muslim women who wear the burqa.

"It is absolutely ridiculous that people should choose to go around looking like letter boxes," he wrote.

He went on to attack young women turning "up at school or at a university lecture looking like a bank robber." He likened a state ban on the burqa to "a parent confronted by a rebellious teenager".

Conference notes:

1. Fiyaz Mughal from the Islamophobia monitoring group Tell Mama slammed Johnson's comments as "clearly" Islamophobic.
2. Labour MP David Lammy attacked Boris Johnson as a "pound-shop Donald Trump fanning the flames of Islamophobia to propel his grubby electoral ambitions".
3. Former Tory party chair Baroness Warsi argued Johnson was using Muslim women as "a convenient political football to increase poll ratings among the Tory faithful".

Conference further notes:

- a) A woman wearing the niqab was targeted soon after in London, according to the Tell Mama hate crime monitoring group.
- b) This was followed by a further three attacks in London and Luton on the following day.
- c) Tell Mama has said that there is a "direct link" between the spike in attacks on Muslim women and Johnson's comments.

Conference believes:

- i) Women have the right to wear what they want, when they want.
- ii) Attacking a woman who chooses to wear a burqa, niqab, or hijab is an attack on all women.
- iii) Comments like those from Boris Johnson will increase the confidence of a growing far right and the racist supporters of nazi Tommy Robinson.

Conference calls for:

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

National Women's Committee to consider working with other service groups to look at the best way to raise these issues with the wider membership.

38. SHOW TRANSPHOBIA THE RED CARD

Carried as Amended: 38.1

Conference, we are deeply disturbed by the rise in transphobia towards trans women during and following the recent consultation regarding the Gender Recognition Act (GRA). Whilst we recognise everyone is entitled to their own view, hate must not infiltrate our union.

Conference welcomes the UNISON stance of supporting self-identification, but much work is still needed with women to accept that trans women who self identify are women and should be accepted, included and welcome in our union.

There are a number of anti-trans groups who are spreading hate around the issues of the GRA and self identification and this is creeping into our Women's Committees by means of leaflets. The vitriol being targeted at trans women carries the transphobic messages that one cannot be a feminist and a trans ally and that trans women specifically threaten women only spaces, or that trans women cannot identify as lesbians.

Trans women ARE women. There is no evidence to suggest that trans women transition in order to gain access to women's safe spaces.

Conference calls upon National Women's Committee to:-

- A) Work with the National LGBT Committee on eradicating transphobia within UNISON.
- B) Work with the National LGBT Committee to promote the 'How to be a good trans ally' leaflet across all branches.
- C) Distribute the UNISON model Trans Equality Policy to all Regional Women's Committees and Branch Women's Officers to ensure support for our trans sisters is disseminated throughout the women's network of UNISON.
- D) Work with the National LGBT Committee in order to educate all women in terms of the trans community and the hate they face and to ensure that all trans women members are aware of the support that is available to them.

39. Educational exclusion and the disproportionate impact on girls

Carried

Throughout the country there has been a massive rise in permanent exclusions and children being educated at home. Recent figures show a national increase of 300% in permanent exclusions in 2017. The Department of Education's report on permanent and fixed term exclusions published in 2016/17 stated that some secondary schools are excluding up to 20% of their pupils or offering elective home education (EHE) as an alternative to attending school.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

In Northumberland alone last year there were 115 permanent exclusions, a 60 % rise in the previous year. Of these 115 exclusions, 34 were for girls, a rise of 11% to the previous year. Already this year the trend continues with double the exclusions there were this time last year and the exclusions for girls continues to rise. EHE figures are alarming too. 282 children were registered throughout Northumberland, 133 of these were girls 47% of the total.

However for girls, exclusion can be a lot different than it is for boys as a report from Joseph Rowntree Foundation highlights;

Girls and exclusion from school 2001 reports; Teenage girls who are excluded from school or who have stopped attending because of disaffection, bullying or family difficulties are an "underestimated minority" whose problems should be urgently recognised and tackled, according to research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and published by the National Children's Bureau. Its 2001 report, Not a Problem? Girls and School Exclusion, suggests that the widespread view that "girls are not a problem" is a myth that will be perpetuated as long as schools and local education authorities base their exclusion and behavioural policies on boys. The report blamed the Government's emphasis on boys' achievement and disaffection for leading some professionals to neglect the needs of girls, who have a tendency to withdraw and/or truant rather than displaying the kind of behaviour that teachers and authorities feel they must respond to immediately.

Cathy Street, a co-author of the report, said: "Multi-agency working is crucial if the more subtle difficulties presented by girls are to be identified and addressed. Education and child and adolescent mental health services need to work more effectively together."

Lack of good alternative provision has left many girls without any education and some parents don't have the proper resources to educate children themselves. Once a girl is excluded they are often placed in alternative provision that is largely a male environment, this can be intimidating for vulnerable female students. Meeting the specific needs of girls is often overlooked, for example not having girl toilets that provide sanitary products. Girls can often self exclude in these type of environments. Often a girl who becomes educated at home becomes isolated especially in rural areas and may become vulnerable to abuse within the home or sexual exploitation, eating disorders, self harm and they are still open to cyber-bullying. for example poor behaviour at school which leads to exclusion can at times be a symptom of sexual exploitation as the school can be the only safe place to display feelings of frustration.

Lack of funding and pressures on schools to meet DFE targets have left these girls with little or no support. Often with girls exclusion there are links to bullying as girls tend to foster one to one friendships rather than groups as boys do and once they have lost a friend they have lost a great ally and this can lead to social exclusion and or bullying particularly on social media. Mental health services who could help are stretched and very often girls are not getting the support in schools from specialised staff to identify these problems before there result in exclusion or parents opting for EHE to avoid exclusion or further action by the schools in relation to non attendance.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

Some schools have encouraged parents to educate their children at home (EHE) when their children's behaviour is deemed problematic or attendance is poor as there isn't support staff to help.

This has meant many girls are not in school and often their mothers bear the brunt of having to teach and care for them when they should be in school. Many women have had to give up work and the implications are far reaching, changes in circumstances now result in new applications to Universal credit which can take many weeks to assess, a further strain on families were the women may be the breadwinner single parent families where women are reliant on benefits and not in work lose out, from free school meals for children and often turn to food banks. Reports show that children who are excluded are 4 times more likely to come from a poor background.

This worrying trend in the rise in exclusions for girls through, exclusion from school, and self exclusion often through opting to educate at home when they feel their problems haven't been addressed or they haven't been listened too.

Conference calls upon the women's committee to:

1. Work with branches and regions to create a campaign for
 - a) Improved funding for more support staff in schools to enable work with other agencies to identify problems which may lie behind their behaviours leading to exclusion for the girls whether it be from school or social exclusion.
 - b) To encourage specific targeted help for girls in schools so they can have a voice and highlight their problems before they result in exclusion in whatever form.
2. Work with Labour link and lobby government to highlight some of the poor alternative provision provided for girls once they are excluded.
3. Work with Labour link to highlight with local MP's the impact on women/ girls of this increase in exclusion and EHE.

40. Organising Against the Odds

Carried

Last year's women's conference agreed that organising among low paid women should be a union priority. It was shown that shockingly more than half of UNISONs women members meet the criteria of being classed as low paid.

Conference discussed the fact that fragmented workforces are often blamed as to why organising amongst this group of members is hard with more women employed within care services, schools, catering and cleaning than any other occupation. It is true to state that organising amongst this group is difficult but conference agreed that however hard it is if low paid women represent 58% of the union 's membership it has to be a key area of our work.

2019 National Women's Conference Decisions

Organising around an issue often makes it easier to engage with members and there have been successful campaigns throughout the union targeting the low pay and highlighting the impact this has. Lifting those 58% of members out of low pay and fighting for better working conditions must be a key part of any union organising model.

This Conference Notes

1. Birmingham UNISON Branches' work organising home care enablement assistants to fight against the cuts they were facing.
2. That a lot of branch resources were needed to help members to win their ballot, not once but twice and members had to take substantial action over many months to be heard.
3. That member's involvement and mass participation in the strike was key to building the strength of the union.
4. That we need to recognise that organising, not servicing, is what makes our union stronger and more able to win things.
5. That we need to organise workers at the grassroots and teach them how they should be directly involved in building a strong union in their own workplaces, so that they have the power to win things for themselves.

Conference therefore requests the women's committee:

- i) Encourage regions to map our women members working in Councils, NHS, community, voluntary and private sectors to identify target areas for organising.
- ii) Review and develop materials to help branches turn members into activists.
- iii) Survey regions and branches and produce a series of best practice case studies with supporting materials and contact information on each of the case studies.
- iv) Develop materials that will help staff and lay organisers to teach workers how the workers themselves need to build a strong union in their own workplaces so they have the power to win things themselves now and in the future.