

Green UNISON week

UNISON ENERGY SGE – Leading the way to a cleaner and greener future in energy!

We fully support the legally binding targets the UK has agreed to regarding climate change and the reduction in greenhouse gas targets. The move to net zero by 2050 will be a huge challenge especially for those working in the energy industry which accounts (domestic consumption) for some 20% of total greenhouse gas emissions.

For that reason UNISON energy members have fully engaged in the debate bringing their skills and knowledge of the industry to develop sustainable solutions which are pragmatic and deliverable. We recognise that there are no jobs on a dead planet and so we are playing a full role in ensuring that carbon intensive energy sources are phased out.

UNISON is clear that to address climate change in the energy sector a Just Transition is required. This means that energy workers are not simply stranded by measures to address climate change. Rather they should be offered specific protections in the form of alternative equivalent employment or social protections that leave them not disadvantaged. UNISON was part of a global trade union delegation to the COP21 climate change talks in Paris which secured reference to a Just Transition in the agreement. We don't want charity but instead argue that to decarbonise the UK will actually require all the skills and labour of our members and more for many years to come. This needs planning and organising in the best interests of the UK and therefore public ownership of the energy system is essential.

We are demanding three key changes which are essential to decarbonise energy and hit net zero by 2050

1. We demand a national domestic energy efficiency programme to ensure every UK home meets an EPC 'C' rating within a 15 year time frame. We have costed this programme and believe it to be the most efficient policy response to driving net zero. The details can be found in our own report 'Warm Homes'. Ensuring every UK home meets the EPC 'C' standard would go some way to eradicating fuel poverty by tackling poor quality homes and reducing significantly the amount of energy needed to be consumed to have a comfortable level of warmth. Average savings of some £600 per annum could be achieved by adopting our recommendations. Such a programme would also help preserve domestic gas supplies (secure) and limit needless emissions (clean) as less fuel is consumed. This is our number one energy priority.

<https://www.unison.org.uk/our-campaigns/keeping-homes-warm-and-meeting-the-uks-energy-challenges/>

2. UNISON is calling for the transformation of the UK's gas network from one burning Methane to one that eventually uses Hydrogen with its minimal carbon emissions when burnt. We have been instrumental in developing the All Party Parliamentary Group on Hydrogen and hosted a key industrial round table on the subject. UNISON's Energy Conference has also passed consecutive motions in support of hydrogen conversion. We believe that a conversion over 15 years in geographic blocks would enable a hydrogen conversion of the entire gas network to take place, retaining all the jobs and expertise within the industry and developing new skilled employment. We fully acknowledge that for the early life of this development Hydrogen would be created through steam reformation (essentially washing methane gas and storing the carbon in salt caverns underground CCS). It would also allow

for the blending of gas and use of bio gas. Over a longer period of time the hydrogen would be produced by electrolysis using renewable electricity. Such a development would be truly transformative but is eminently possible and realistic and we believe presents the best hope of saving the planet from carbon emissions. Such a development would best be achieved through public ownership of the gas network. Hydrogen production on scale would also allow for the cost effective development of vehicles powered by hydrogen and the retention of energy intensive industries

<https://www.unison.org.uk/news/press-release/2018/11/government-must-give-bold-hydrogen-scheme-go-ahead-says-unison/>

3. UNISON is calling for the public ownership of retail supply in which thousands of our members work. Such a publicly owned energy supplier would manage the critical energy relationship with UK consumers and begin the process of winning hearts and minds for the decarbonisation changes needed in people's homes. Without such a body the delivery of the ambitious energy efficiency programme will not happen to plan. The public supplier would use the talents of its employees to engage in the millions of conversations needed to secure decarbonisation solutions for every home in the UK and plan the delivery of the measures required. It would also create a single national buyer for energy for the purposes of retail supply which should be able to apply genuine pressure on generators to lower the costs of purchase and be in the position to drive supply standards on energy mix so enabling the greater use of renewable production required to hit net zero. Essentially a number of objectives could be driven by having a publicly owned retailer through purchasing decisions. Public ownership would allow for investment in ensuring people get the best service possible. It could be driven so that a consistent approach was taken putting customers first, dealing sensitively with debt issues and providing appropriate support to vulnerable customers.

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/06/UNISONenergypublicownershipreport0619.pdf>

For further information please contact UNISON's national officer for Energy - Matthew Lay, 130 Euston Rd, London, NW1 2AY m.lay@unison.co.uk