

# 2021 Virtual Special Energy Service Group Conference

## UNISON FINAL AGENDA

10 Jun 2021

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### 1. Addressing inequality in the Energy sector after Covid - we need more female engineers in the energy sector

Conference notes that the gender pay gap in the UK is one of the highest in Europe and is concerned that in a substantial number of energy companies it is higher even than the UK average of 17.3%. Reporting the gender pay gap is currently suspended due to the pandemic but the last reports in April 2019 showed EDF Energy Limited, for example, has a median gender pay gap of 25.6%, Npower - 21% and Centrica - 19.5%. British Gas has the largest gender pay gap of any firm within the UK energy industry's big six, paying its male employees a shocking 49% more than its female staff.

Conference notes further that only 5% of executive board seats in UK-based energy companies are held by women, and 61% have no women at all on their board. Women account for only 14% of workers in energy and tend to work in customer facing and support roles rather than engineering which is heavily dominated by men and higher paid.

Conference notes that the gender pay gap has increased during the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. Much of this is due to the fact that in the UK, women still do the majority of caring, whether paid or unpaid. Women who work and have children and/or other caring responsibilities have been hit hardest having to balance doing their job with childcare. A report from the TUC in January 2021 highlighted how working mothers have picked up the lion's share of caring responsibilities and that one in six working mothers – mainly those on the lowest pay – have had to reduce their hours at work as a direct result of school and childcare closures. Some have been forced out of work altogether.

Conference believes that gender barriers need to be addressed and that as a predominantly female trade union UNISON should lead the way in calling for action from the industry.

We believe we need more visible female role models and we need louder, clearer leadership and targets. We also need a range of internal policies and programmes – for example, on flexible working and changes to recruitment practice. We need to see the industry taking positive steps to encourage women to apply for traditionally male roles and to support their career development.

Conference congratulates the National Women's Committee on the #bridgethegap campaign, trailblazer project and gender pay gap bargaining tools launched in April 2019. Conference notes that post-pandemic, closing the gender pay gap will be even more important to halt the reverse in gender equality brought about during the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions.

Conference calls on the Energy Service Group Executive to:

1. Ensure that closing the gender pay gap is included as a priority in both national and local bargaining in the energy sector

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2. Work with the sector to develop visible female role models, encourage flexible working and change recruitment practices to attract women to work in traditionally male roles such as engineering
3. Work with the National Women's Committee to encourage energy branches to participate in UNISON's national gender pay gap trailblazer project

### ***National Women's Committee***

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#### **2. Addressing inequality in the Energy Sector for Black workers in a post pandemic world**

At its inception in 2016, the Energy and Utilities Skills Partnership, made up of 30 utility organisations; gas, power, water, and waste management, recognised the underrepresentation of Black workers across the sector, citing, "Workforce diversity and inclusion levels for the sector continue to be below the UK averages, with only 7% of the sector's employees coming from Black or other minority backgrounds, with the majority of the workforce across the sector, being white and male." This is still an acknowledgement in their latest Workforce Strategy for 2020-2025.

Two of the most dangerous pre-existing, pre-COVID-19 conditions for Black workers are racism and economic inequality. These conditions, and their impact on Black workers were evident throughout the pandemic and the fall out post COVID-19 is expected to be worse, with the devastation lasting many more years for Black Workers than for their white counterparts.

The National Black Members Committee (NBMC) calls on the Energy Service Group Executive to:

1. Work collectively with the NBMC to develop an action plan to ensure energy sector employers commit to addressing the inequality of Black workers in the sector as a key feature of their Post Pandemic recovery plans.
2. Continue to work with the NBMC to highlight the disproportionate impact of COVID- 19 on Black workers in the sector by collating and monitoring data on redundancies, furlough, job losses and that data feeds into UNISON work.
3. Work with the NBMC to support energy sector Black members so that employers can:
  - i) work on developing, and implementing their post pandemic recovery and recruitment plans, in addition to facilitating strategic advocacy and self- organising support for Black workers in this sector.
  - ii) Support the development of a good practice guide for activists and representatives in this sector, in the context of developing equality guidance for Black workers and employer engagement.

### ***National Black Members' Committee***

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### 3. UNISON Energy workers and the drive to Net Zero and Carbon Neutrality by 2050

This special energy conference notes that in November in Glasgow the previously delayed (due to Covid restrictions) COP 26 will take place. This will bring together nations from across the world to report on progress made since the COP 21 Paris Agreement was reached in 2015.

This conference also notes that since 2015 the UK Government has legislated and is now committed to achieving Net Zero by 2050 but it has not done enough to tackle the difficult areas that need addressing if we are to hit this target.

In the meantime, the UNISON energy service group has led the way in promoting practical ways to bring about net zero 2050. More than any other union, we have within the UNISON Energy service group promoted measures that retain and promote our members jobs in the energy sector but at the same time drive the changes necessary to decarbonise energy and ensure the benefits are shared as widely as possible and importantly are deliverable.

The Energy service group has;

- 1) Promoted the benefits of a mass domestic energy efficiency to bring UK homes up to an EPC C or above rating and in doing so reduce domestic emissions and eradicate fuel poverty.
- 2) We have pushed the development of Hydrogen technology which has massive potential and would allow the transition from methane gas to clean gas to take place while at the same time delivering the solution to zero carbon heat and retaining and developing the skills of gas workers.
- 3) Led the way in calling for public ownership of energy retail, as a means to bringing energy consumers on board with the drive to achieving net zero and ensuring popular public support is in place and any adaptations in the home are organised effectively.
- 4) Sought to promote the importance of Women in the Energy system and to promote more opportunities for them to progress and benefit from future investment and play a leading role in the drive to Net Zero.

As we face the future, the goal of achieving net zero looks further away and without doubt each year that passes the task get harder. This will lead to more uncertainty for our energy members, more lost opportunities, more lost energy jobs and it denies them the opportunity to play a major role in tackling climate change and leading the response to net zero.

Conference, therefore calls on the Energy SGE to;

A. Continue to promote the work that the service group has led on and ensure that all key stakeholders are aware of the positive measures we have proposed. This

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should also include engaging with the COP 26 in Glasgow and working within UNISON to inform other SGE and wider membership of our work.

B. Ensure that UNISON energy members jobs are put at the forefront of any debate around Net Zero and that we deliver a just transition for all not just a few.

C. Promote the notion of public ownership within the energy retail and supply space and use the levers this would bring to win the heart and minds of all consumers in the UK, deliver Net Zero in people's homes and improve the working terms and conditions for energy members.

D. Promote and support the continued development of the Hydrogen solution for domestic heat and industrial processes. A solution that supports our members in the gas industry to move to a clean gas future by 2050.

E. Campaign to ensure the move to net zero does not increase the burden on the lowest income householders and eradicated fuel poverty.

F. Continue to promote the role of women in the energy system and drive greater understanding that to achieve Net Zero will require the talents and skills of all workers and so it is essential that more is done to make the energy industry and attractive place to work and develop.

G. Help and support the need to develop a broader understanding of how Net Zero will impact on the provision of public services in the UK and contribute to future work streams building on the experience and knowledge of our energy membership.

***Energy Service Group Executive***

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### **4. Organising in Energy as we drive towards Net Zero**

This special energy conference notes that to achieve Net Zero substantial investment will be needed within the Energy sector, both with established employers with whom we have an existing relationship, and likely new (and as yet not in existence) employers too) This could and should bring about new job growth within the energy sector over the coming years.

We recognise however that employment in the traditional Energy sector has over the last few years been reducing significantly as a result of; restructuring, digitalisation, lack of investment, a fragmented market place and unfair competition, short term thinking in regulation and lack of political direction. This has impacted trade union membership numbers but not density levels.

We also need to note that many of our members have traditionally worked in large offices but since Covid have been home based. This has proven an additional challenge to our traditional ways of organising and the future for our ways of working will likely be different as a result.

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In order to; maintain our position as the largest staff union in the Energy sector into the future, to also continue to protect our existing members' rights, and to grow our membership when employment growth takes place from new investment and action on Net Zero, this motion calls on the Energy Service Group to:

1. Work with the strategic organising unit to develop new tools for recruiting and organising online and recognising that many more workers will be home based in the future, so we need to adapt.
2. Develop a range of specific UNISON flyers and posters, aimed at supporting the drive to Net Zero by 2050, for branches to use to aid recruitment and which highlight the positive role UNISON is playing in supporting energy jobs and decarbonisation efforts.
3. Support the development of a range of recruitment incentives and ideas that branches can establish and administer in their workplaces built around the campaign on climate change and share best practice.
4. Continue to lead from the front in taking a progressive approach to Net Zero developing and promoting solutions that can work and deliver while retaining the skills and employment of Energy workers and members.
5. Promote the work of the Energy Service Group within UNISON and continue to build a strong UNISON brand in the wider energy sector.

*Energy Service Group Executive*

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### **5. Homeworking as a reasonable adjustment in post-COVID Energy workplaces**

Conference notes that many disabled staff in Energy workplaces have previously requested to work from home as a reasonable adjustment and been refused. However, COVID-19 has sparked a revolution in home working and as a union we need to build on the positives for disabled workers whilst also guarding against any detrimental impact.

UNISON's National Disabled Members Committee carried out a survey of disabled members at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in June 2020. 5,000 disabled members responded, including members working in the Energy service group. The survey found:

- a) 50% of disabled members were working from home, compared to just 5% before the pandemic
- b) 73% said they were more productive or as productive compared to being in the workplace

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- c) Many reported having to take less time off sick
- d) The reasons for increased productivity and reduced sickness absence included being better able to manage their pain at home, able to take short breaks or work a more flexible day with later start and finish times, and not having to make a long commute that impacted on their impairments
- e) 54% of disabled workers said they wanted to continue to work from home after COVID-19
- f) However 37% said their employer was likely to refuse to allow them to continue to work from home

Conference notes that there have been some examples of best practice in the Energy service group, with some disabled staff given the tools and resources they need to work from home during the pandemic and a growing realisation from some employers that they need to allow more staff to work from home in a post-pandemic world.

Some Energy employers have also ensured that staff have the same adjustments at home as they have at work – or have provided additional adjustments required for home working.

Nonetheless, there remain Energy employers who are reluctant to allow home working in the future for disabled workers who need it as a reasonable adjustment. There are also employers who failed to transfer existing adjustments from the workplace or provide additional reasonable adjustments for staff working from home.

UNISON has a number of tools Energy branches and stewards can use in arguing for homeworking as a reasonable adjustment including:

- i) Our Homeworking guide
- ii) Our two new 'Stewards Guides' to representing disabled workers and representing Deaf workers

However conference believes that in the post-pandemic world we need to negotiate with Energy employers for a much stronger right to working from home for disabled workers who want it, and for the adjustments these staff require to make this a success.

Nonetheless, we must also protect disabled workers who want to return to the workplace from being forced to work from home in order to save the employer money or allow the employer to avoid ensuring accessible workplaces. Home working should be a choice for disabled workers, not a requirement.

The impact of home working on isolation and mental health also needs to be tackled and Energy employers need to put additional safeguards in place to address virtual bullying and harassment.

Conference therefore calls on the Energy service group executive to work with the national disabled members committee to seek to:

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1. Negotiate with employers to produce stronger guidance on agreeing homeworking as a reasonable adjustment for disabled workers who want it, and on ensuring reasonable adjustments are provided for disabled home workers
2. Agree safeguards against disabled workers being forced to work from home against their will if this is not their preference
3. Achieve strengthened advice on supporting staff mental health whilst working from home and measures to tackle virtual bullying and harassment
4. Publicise UNISON's Homeworking Guide to regions and branches
5. Circulate the two new 'Stewards Guides' to representing disabled and Deaf workers to regions and branches

### ***National Disabled Members Committee***

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#### **6. Accessing reasonable adjustments during COVID-19**

Conference notes that a UNISON survey of disabled members working from home during COVID-19, including Energy workers, found that 53% did not receive any reasonable adjustments from their employer to help them to overcome the barriers they faced as a disabled person working from home.

Only 5% had help from Access to Work, the flagship government scheme which helps identify and fund adjustments. 41% did not know about Access to Work and 23% did not think Access to Work could help with working from home.

As a result of these findings, UNISON wrote to the Chancellor in July 2020 asking for increased investment in Access to Work and for its extension to cover equipment required for homeworking. UNISON followed this up with meetings with civil servants. Conference welcomes the subsequent announcement by government in August 2020 that Access to Work would receive further investment and be extended to include home working.

However, there is still far too little awareness of Access to Work by both staff and employers covered by the Energy service group, as was highlighted by the experience of our members during COVID-19.

Many Energy workers struggled to get the adjustments they needed at home. Some had to use makeshift adjustable desks, had to buy their own monitors and head sets, were unable to access virtual meetings and thus isolated from the rest of their colleagues, or had to manage the pain caused by unsuitable dining room chairs.

'Long COVID' has also affected disabled workers who are being chased through punitive sickness absence procedures by their employers. Some previously non-disabled workers may now be covered by the Equality Act 2010 which gives a right to reasonable adjustments to people whose symptoms have a significant impact on normal daily activities and have lasted or are likely to last 12 months or more.

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However, conference does not have confidence that all Energy managers will accept this duty.

Conference believes that one way to ensure employers take seriously their responsibility to provide reasonable adjustments is to agree an 'Accessibility Passport' system. This allows adjustments to be agreed once without the need for stewards to argue the case every time the worker gets a new manager or changes teams.

Some Energy employers have implemented a passport system for reasonable adjustments. However, others do not have a passport system and some staff struggled during COVID 19 to get the adjustments they needed for home working.

UNISON has produced a Reasonable Adjustments Bargaining Guide which includes a template passport that can be adopted by Energy employers. Key to UNISON's bargaining guide is that the employer should respond to requests for adjustments within a specified timescale and should also agree a timetable for implementing adjustments, overcoming the twin issues of our members receiving no response to their request or waiting years for agreed adjustments to be put in place. The guide also includes frequently asked questions that can help Energy employers understand the benefits of a passport system.

Conference further notes that UNISON has also published a Quick Guide to Access to Work which can be shared with Energy members.

Conference therefore calls on the Energy Service Group Executive to:

- a) Raise the inconsistency of access to reasonable adjustments during COVID-19 with the employers, seeking ways to ensure there is a more joined up approach in future
- b) Publicise the government's Access to Work scheme to members and branches in Energy, using the UNISON guide
- c) Seek to negotiate with employers both nationally and locally to discount sickness absence "triggers" for workers with 'Long COVID' and to work towards clear acknowledgement by the employers of the right to reasonable adjustments where the Equality Act applies.
- d) Circulate UNISON's Reasonable Adjustment and Accessibility Passport Bargaining Guide to branches and encourage them to include achieving an accessibility passport agreement with the employer as part of their local bargaining agenda.
- e) Encourage branches to share successfully negotiated passport agreements and best practise on reasonable adjustments agreed during COVID-19 with UNISON's bargaining support unit so that other branches can learn from them.

***National Disabled Members Committee***

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### **7. Facilitating Disabled Workers to continue to work from home post pandemic**

Prior to the pandemic there seemed to be practices within Energy employers where managers suggested that jobs such as back-office work and call centre work couldn't be done from home due to technological limitations. People's physical and mental difficulties can mean their conditions make it hard for people to get to and from offices. This limits their ability to access the job market creating inequality for disabled workers. The pandemic has proven that employers can facilitate quick turnaround for staff to be accommodated to work from home. This has demonstrated that home working is available for anybody following negotiations with the employers.

Post pandemic we want employers to be more flexible and consider offering home working to people as an opportunity, widening the access for everybody in the job market irrespective of abilities. We want to support our branches negotiating wider access for staff to work from home particularly for our members with disabilities.

Conference calls on the Energy Service Group Executive to:

1. Map how many disabled members the large Energy employers have been working from home;
2. Provide this information to branches to facilitate their negotiations with employers;
3. Gather best practice Working from Home policies and share these with branches.
4. Provide a How to Guide to negotiate working from home policies or enhance current policies.

***Yorkshire - Humberside Region***

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### **8. No going backwards on LGBT+ equality in Energy**

Conference acknowledges that even before Covid, equality was increasingly being seen as a luxury in many Energy workplaces, with some employers barely abiding by the law. There is now a risk of going backwards.

Conference recognises that equality is at the heart of UNISON, and that self organisation is an essential tool to achieving UNISON's equality objectives.

Conference welcomes that many Energy branches recognise the importance of self organisation.

Conference further welcomes that many Energy branches have Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender plus (LGBT+) officers, allowing LGBT+ equality to be raised at branch committee meetings and assisting branches to bargain with employers to make their workplaces more inclusive.

Conference recognises that Energy service group rules, language and practices that are inclusive to our LGBT+ members are vital for us to achieve our equality

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objectives. Likewise, it is vital that all Energy branches demand that employers consider the impact of policies and practices on LGBT+ staff.

Conference further recognises that discrimination faced by LGBT+ people at work remains persistent and widespread and notes there is still a significant lack of knowledge, particularly about trans equality, among many employer HR departments and leads.

Additionally, Conference notes with concern that the TUC reported in 2019, that nearly seven in ten LGBT+ people reported being sexually harassed at work, yet two thirds didn't report it to their employer. One in four of those who didn't report it said it was because they were afraid of being 'outed' at work.

Conference further notes that 2018 National Delegate Conference called on the National Executive Council to work with the self organised groups, regions and branches to continue to work towards making UNISON recruitment and organising, advice, negotiations, campaigns, services, communications and language inclusive of non-binary members. Non-binary people are people whose gender identity is not solely male or female. The ability to be yourself at work impacts on your work performance, your relationships with colleagues and your health, both mental and physical. This is clearly a trade union issue, and there is still much to do, including within the Energy Sector.

Conference recognises that the many barriers to challenging discriminatory behaviour often stem from a lack of information, education, support and firm policies in the workplace. It is essential that there are allies in workplaces for all LGBT+ identities. It welcomes the development of the new UNISON trans ally and LGBT+ ally training programmes, aimed at giving all non-LGBT+ members the opportunity to explore what it means to be an ally and to identify ways of creating an inclusive working environment for everyone.

Conference therefore calls on the Energy Service Group Executive, working in liaison with the national LGBT+ committee, to keep LGBT+ equality centre stage in bargaining and:

1. Encourage the negotiation of inclusive language in agreements and policies, and of inclusive practices and procedures, across the service group;
2. Urge branches to use UNISON's trans equality guide and model policy, along with the LGBT+ bargaining factsheets and guide to non-binary inclusion to review policies and agreements with employers with a view to achieving best practice;
3. Urge branches where employers have no trans equality policy to seek to negotiate the adoption of UNISON's model policy;
4. Circulate guidance for branches on key areas of work on all aspects of equality including inclusive language;
5. Promote UNISON's LGBT+ and Trans Ally training courses across the service group;

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6. Promote the use of UNISON's Trans Ally and Bi+ Ally leaflets to members across the service group;
7. Encourage branches to promote UNISON's Bi+, Trans, Black LGBT+ and Disabled LGBT+ network meetings;
8. Encourage Energy branches to send delegates to UNISON's LGBT+ annual conference.

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

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#### **9. Robust Green Skills Training for employees in the Energy Sector**

Conference notes addressing the climate change challenge requires a fundamental restructuring of the energy supply sector, moving away from the world's fossil fuel-based system to one that relies on clean, renewable sources.

The transition to a greener economy requires new skills. Skills needed for the newly emerging jobs, and skills needed for the adjusted existing jobs. Without a suitably trained workforce the transition will be impossible.

Skill gaps are already happening in a number of sectors such as renewable energy. The availability of workers with the right skills for green jobs plays not only a critical role in initiating the transition to a green economy, but also in enabling a just transition that ensures social inclusion and decent work. Employers investing in new technologies need to be able to find workers with the right skills.

Investment in skills and education should be an integral part of recovery plans after COVID19. Vocational training and reskilling can improve transferability across firms and sectors, While the energy transformation is likely to have an overall net-positive impact on employment, millions of fossil-fuel workers will need to find new jobs

The transfer of skilled labour from fossil fuel sectors remains low. If that's to increase, government and business need to make firm commitments and establish a long-term vision in support of energy transition and to protect jobs and livelihoods and put the investment into up-skilling existing employees in the energy sector.

Partnerships between governments and industry can and should be built to finance reskilling and to ensure that training content meets the needs of the sector.

Conference, therefore, calls upon the Energy Service Group Executive to:

A: Work with labour link to ensure commitment to green job skills and training through Labour energy policy.

B: Ask UNISON Branches in the energy sector to work with employers, through negotiation, to ensure upskilling and training in green skills and jobs.

***EDF Energy (Doxford)***

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### 9.1

Fifth paragraph, 3rd line after 'and to protect' insert 'unionised';

Point A, after 'Work with labour link' insert 'and all of the key stakeholders'

*Energy Service Group Executive*